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Photo by Claude Harris

THE AUTHOR

[Frontispiece

MY
MOTLEY LIFE
A TALE OF STRUGGLE

By KEBLE HOWARD
(JOHN KEBLE BELL)

“An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memoirs may serve worthily that spirit of piety towards all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of a man reviewing his own experience.”

JOSEPH CONRAD

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To
MY WIFE

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P R E F A C E

IF a man sets out on the real journey of Life at the age of twenty, I suppose I have now arrived at the Halfway House Inn. Sitting in the shaded porch of that welcome house, with you, the Reader, on the opposite bench, I propose to tell you some of the adventures of my journey, so far as it has gone, and try to picture for you many of the interesting and celebrated people with whom I have had the good fortune to come in contact on the road

K. H.

Hove, 1927.

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MY MOTLEY LIFE

CHAPTER I

MY FIRST HERO—AND HEROINE

THE first hero I ever met was my father. We met at Basingstoke, in Hampshire, where my father was curate-in-charge of some church which I cannot remember.

I regret to say that my father and I were not, at this time, on speaking terms, nor did we get to know each other at all intimately until after we left Basingstoke, which happened when I was nine months old.

I think it must have been my arrival—the sixth occurrence of the kind which had so far taken place—that spurred the good man on to try for a better position in the Church. He was the last man in the world to seek preferment for its own sake, but no curate-in-charge can support adequately a wife and six children, especially when the latest-born devours inordinate quantities of bread soaked in hot water. (Whenever I suffer from indigestion, my wife insists that it is really due to this early diet, which was not prescribed by my mother, but by a devoted “general” to whom I appear to have been greatly attached.)

Be that as it may, my father applied for the living of Henley-in-Arden, near Stratford-on-Avon, War-

wickshire. Henley, as you know, means “old place,” and this was the Arden in which Shakespeare conducted his youthful escapades, and afterwards used as a setting for “As You Like It.” A pretty combination of names, I think

There was a peculiar thing about the living of Henley-in-Arden. It was one of the few livings in England in the gift of the inhabitants, and the inhabitants naturally exercised their privilege to the full. Knowing well that a parson once appointed can never be got rid of, except on the grounds of age, illness, or misconduct, they were very careful as to the kind of man they introduced into their midst, and to whom the care of their souls was entrusted.

In short, my father had to travel from Basingstoke to Henley-in-Arden, get to know the leading inhabitants, read the services on a certain Sunday, and preach a sermon.

Let me describe for you, briefly, the kind of man who one day came walking up the long street from the nearest station, Bearley, four miles away. A man six feet in height, very spare, upright, with a long brown beard (as then worn).

Two great assets he had in addition to his personal appearance and charm of manner—a magnificent voice, with natural chest-notes that could be heard a hundred yards away in ordinary conversation, and a gift for simple, extempore preaching that I have never heard bettered from any pulpit in the land.

He returned to Basingstoke the vicar-elect of Henley-in-Arden, in which place he was destined to spend the rest of his beneficed life—nearly forty years.

My mother, who had been too busy or too ill or too poor to accompany my father on this visit, was very keen, you may be sure, to learn the fullest possible details of the vicarage (a “vicarage” by courtesy only), of the church, of the little town, and of the people.

My father’s description, I have always understood, was not prepossessing. He told her that the house was a small one, and that it was tightly wedged between a large ugly residence of red brick—subsequently the Bank—and a public-house called “The King’s Head”—a favourite pull-up, in those days, for the village drunkards, but now, I believe, a model of all the virtues. (I don’t know whether he added that from the windows you could also command a view of “The Bear,” “The White Swan,” “The George and Dragon,” “The Three Tuns,” “The Bell,” and “The Black Swan.” Anyhow, you could).

He went on to tell my mother that the house contained two sitting-rooms, two bedrooms, two attics, and a dressing-room; but no bathroom and no “running water.” The garden, at the back of the house, was almost the smallest in the village. I suppose it was a courtesy garden.

The street he described as winding, and nearly a mile in length. The church, he had to confess, was not beautiful, but roomy. There was a fine tower, however, with a clock in it, and six good bells.

“Does the clock chime the hours?” asked my mother.

My father said it did.

“And the quarters?”

“Yes, the quarters, also.”

She was reconciled to the rest. And so we all left Basingstoke for Henley-in-Arden, and I think the spirit of the creator of Jaques and Touchstone must have smiled—perhaps a little sympathetically—over the third-class compartment filled with those eight souls, a nursemaid, and impedimenta to match.

The first thing about this new home which impressed itself on my infant mind was a place we called, “The Black Hole.” This was a sort of loft over the kitchen—I forgot to mention that there was a kitchen, and also a larder—and you could get into it by a little door from the stairs. It was a fearsome place, especially when the cat crouched at the far end, as she usually did, and her eyes glared at us with a green unearthly light.

I was glad when the inhabitants, realising that our quarters were insufficient, especially as the babies continued to arrive until there were twelve in all, clubbed together and built a large room over the kitchen in place of this awful, “Black Hole.” We used this big room as a school-room and nursery, and it was connected with the kitchen below by a service lift. Which brings me to a thrilling tale.

It was a night in February—a cold, windy, rainy night. I was then about five or six years old, and I occupied the higher of the two attics with one of my elder sisters. Being a Sunday, when clergymen’s families work harder than most people (I myself took a class in the Sunday School at the age of *seven*), we had all gone to bed very tired.

I remember waking up to find the door of the attic open, to see my sister sitting up in her bed, and to notice a strange smell of smoke in the room. At the

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foot of a short flight of stairs stood our new general servant, fully dressed, and carrying a lighted benzoline lamp. The time would be somewhere around two in the morning.

“What’s the matter?” asked my sister, anxiously.

“You’d best wake yer Pa and Ma,” was the calm reply. “The ‘ouse is afire.”

My sister jumped out of her bed and tried to pull me out of mine. But I was sleepy and cross. I remember telling her there was nothing the matter, and refusing to budge. Whereupon she wrapped a blanket round me—I can feel that blanket at this moment—and dragged me down the stairs as best she could. For years after I swore that my head bumped on every stair, but that *may* have been an exaggeration.

We found the other members of the family assembling on the lower landing, the fire being in the wing at the back, where nobody was sleeping. The smoke was pretty bad, and the roar of the flames and the crackle of burning wood terrific! Think of the feelings of my poor mother, who had to collect and count seven children, a husband, a servant, a nurse-maid, and a paying guest. (Yes, we actually had a paying guest in that small house to eke out our slender income. Such is the financial value of the salvation of precious souls).

My father, with somewhat unusual optimism, insisted that the house was not on fire at all! Asked to explain the smoke and the crackling of wood, he said that the sticks put in the oven overnight to dry had somehow caught fire.

He was wrong. The house was well alight. To demonstrate this truth, the servant who had wakened

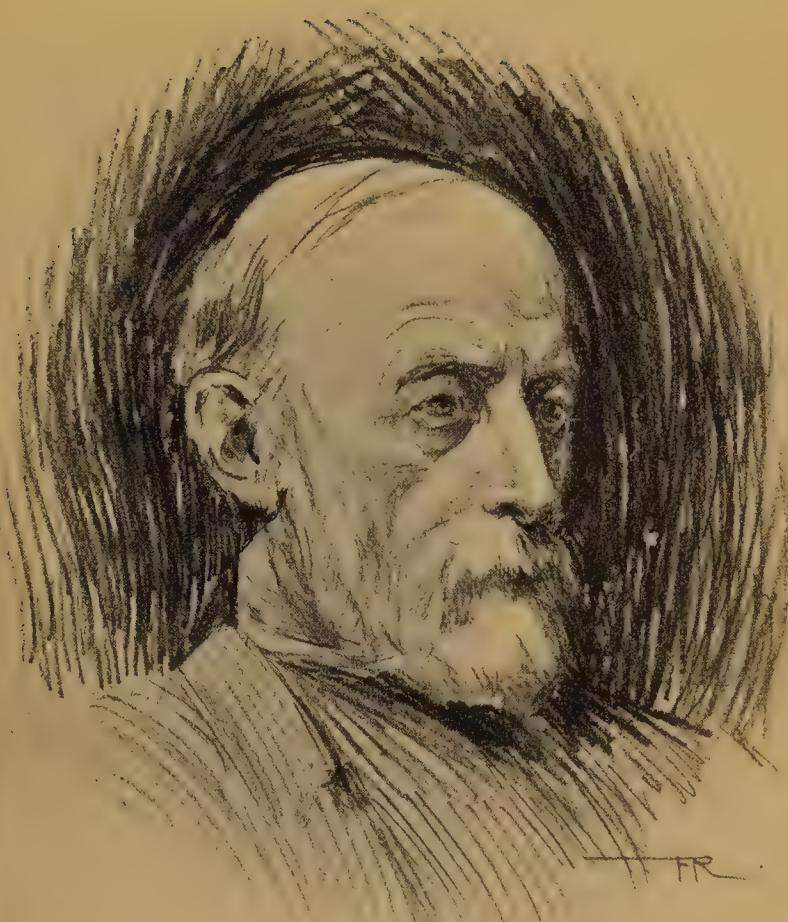
my sister and myself boldly ascended the stairs to the door of the schoolroom, and flung it open ! Out came the smoke and the flames all across the stairway, and beneath that pillar of fire we were all shepherded to safety !

There were many amusing incidents of that night, and some rather touching ones. It was amusing that my father in his hurry forgot his braces, and was thereby handicapped in his efforts to direct the local fire-brigade. It was amusing that my eldest brother was lent a pair of trousers by a neighbour—his first trousers—and spent the rest of the night going from house to house displaying himself in this manly attire. He would be about ten at the time, poor old chap !

It was rather less amusing that the fire-brigade, not knowing where to get water, pulled up a drain-cover and thrust the hose into a stream of doubtful purity which ran the whole length of the village street.

It was touching—and we never forgot it—that dozens of people kindled fires in their houses and cottages at that hour of the morning (irrespective of shades of religion !) and begged to give shelter to one or more of the party. It was not very exhilarating next day when my father had to confess that he had neglected to insure the new room that had been built, which meant that the whole cost of re-building would fall on his already overweighted shoulders—over-weighted then and for many years to come, but never, I promise you, bowed until he had passed his eightieth year and was nearing the ninetieth.

He was a bonny fighter in those days. He loved the poor, but was rather shy of the rich. “Independent in



THE AUTHOR'S FATHER

A Pencil Sketch from life by Frank Reynolds, R.I.

action as in mind " was the motto of his house, and well he lived up to it.

I remember a conversation I had one evening in summertime with our old church clerk, a man who could chime three bells at once—one with each hand and one with his foot—and get never a jangle. He was standing in the doorway of his shop, for he followed the calling of saddler and bridle-maker.

" You see that man standing in his doorway over there ?" he said.

I nodded. I, too, knew the man, and feared him.

" I shall never exchange a word with that man," said the old clerk, " to the day of my death. He did me a wrong that I shall never forgive."

" What was that ?" I asked, deeply interested.

" It was soon after your father first came to Henley. You won't remember it, but he put all the choir into cassocks and surplices, and a fine to-do there was about it. They called him ' Papist ! ' when he went down the street, and a lot of people left the church on that account and never came back to it.

" The first time the choir ever wore them cassocks and surplices was at the funeral of my poor wife. That man over there was one of the coffin-bearers. As soon as he saw the choir standing at the gate of the church-yard in their cassocks and surplices, he set down the coffin in the roadway and walked off. . . . I've never spoke a word to him since, and I never shall."

It took my father many years to live down the crime of putting his choir into cassocks and surplices.

He was also a great fighter at political meetings. He seemed to find the utmost delight in getting on to the

platform and making a speech in direct opposition to the feelings of the meeting.

His ancestry may have been responsible for this. His forbears were bordermen—the Bells of Northumberland. You can hear them talked of to this day at Belford, that Northumbrian village that lies on the side of a hill within a few miles of the Scottish border. They were fighters for generations—not with words, as people mostly fight now, but with all sorts of clumsy, splendidly lethal weapons. I wish I had lived in their day. It is a significant fact that not one of them is buried in Belford churchyard, but some of them found an even more romantic resting-place on Holy Island.

Four generations ago they came southward to Hull, and there my great-grandfather made a fortune out of the whaling industry. A picture of his most famous ship, “*Harmony*,” hangs to-day in the Wilberforce Museum at Hull, and was exhibited in the whaling section at Wembley Exhibition. His son, my grandfather, added to this fortune, and then, divided among his children into five portions, it eventually vanished and was no more seen.

My father, for his part, went as a very young man to the gold-diggings in Australia. It was “the thing” to go—I believe the great Marquis of Salisbury went—but my father could no more dig than he could beg. The sailing-ship took four months out and five months home, and rounded the world in the double voyage. A strange preparation for the life of a parson in a Warwickshire village.

Yet he must have had grit, for, on returning home, he set to work to earn the money to send himself to

Oxford. He did it by tutoring—a laborious and tedious job, to my mind. At the age of thirty or so he had enough in hand to matriculate at St. Alban's Hall—now incorporated with Merton—and three years later took a quite respectable degree.

I would like, with your indulgence, to give you two more instances of this Northumbrian-Yorkshireman's grit. When I was about seven years of age, he bought the most enormous tricycle I have ever seen. It was so large that it had a fourth wheel at the back which never touched the ground unless the rider rashly flung himself backwards and was on the point of breaking his neck. The fourth wheel then came into action, and saved him from the results of his own impetuosity.

My father trundled this colossal vehicle all over the Midland counties, and even insisted on taking it by train one summer to the Isle of Wight. We all went with him. Our journey was a cross-country one, necessitating many changes. Every time we changed the whole station staff was rallied to coax the tricycle out of one train and into another. It was just too large to pass through the doors of the vans, even when opened to their widest extent. Comfortably, that is ; but they always got it in at the finish. They had to get it in because my father would not take his own seat until the tricycle was safely housed. I believe three railway systems were entirely disorganised on that day.

Arrived in the Isle of Wight, he found that the hills were too steep to permit of riding the tricycle. But I took it out on the quiet one day, wheeled it to the top of a particularly steep hill, climbed into the seat (my little legs dangling in mid-air), and off the machine and I went.

I knew there was a brake somewhere, but the pace became so hot I could not find it. The hill was like the side of a house, and the tricycle began to lurch from side to side of the road like a very drunken man. At last came the inevitable crash. I was flung about twenty yards down the hill, the tricycle turned over on its side and slithered down in that fashion, and a horse that was coming up the hill tried to climb a tree.

My knee was badly cut open and my clothes torn to rags. The machine had a broken axle and other injuries. I forgot how many years of my pocket-money it took to pay for the damage.

On another occasion my father captured an escaped lunatic. In the middle of our village street there was a private asylum, not peopled by the inhabitants of Henley-in-Arden, most of whom could not afford luxuries, but by strangers. Now and again, one of these poor creatures would escape, and then there was excitement in the little town, I promise you.

One afternoon the wife of one of the keepers came to my father in great distress. She said a male lunatic had escaped whilst her husband was on duty, and begged the Vicar (to whom everybody turned in trouble) to do what he could about it. My father, without a moment's hesitation, said, "Certainly. I'll find him for you. Don't you worry!"

He put on his wideawake hat and went straight out to find the lunatic.

The maniac was reported to have gone off in the direction of Birmingham. (This is not intended as a slur on Birmingham, a city for which I have had profound respect ever since boyhood's days). It so happened that the floods were out, and the highway to

Birmingham impassable. My father was compelled, therefore, to take to the fields.

After walking for some little time, he saw in the distance a dark figure that was certainly not an agricultural labourer. Thinking this might be the lunatic, my father took off his hat, waved it vigorously, and shouted, "Hi ! Hi !"

The figure turned and came towards him. The Vicar stood his ground. By this time, he was certain that he had found the wanted man.

"Excuse me," said the lunatic, politely. "Can you tell me the way to Henley-in-Arden?"

"Certainly," replied my father. "I am going there myself. Will you give me the pleasure of your company?"

"Delighted," said the amiable creature. And they both retraced their steps. By this time, the whole town was alive with the news. A cart and horse had been procured, manned with stalwarts, and driven up the road towards Birmingham.

This gallant party was in the act of fording the flood when, to their amazement, they saw my father and his strange companion looking at them over the hedge.

"Can you give us a lift?" cried my father—a question very often on his lips in those days, when the nearest railway-station was four miles distant, and, I need hardly say, we had no vehicle of our own except a double perambulator.

"Jump in, sir," called the warriors. And thus the lunatic was restored to sad captivity, and the keeper saved his position.

But I must not weary the reader with stories about a gentleman—however distinctive and remarkable a

gentleman—who was entirely unknown to the world at large.

He remained at Henley-in-Arden until he was eighty years of age, having been the vicar thirty-eight years. He was still vicar when it was arranged to combine the living with that of Beaudesert, hardly a stone's throw separating the two churches. Beaudesert was worth twice the living of Henley-in-Arden, though the population was about one-tenth. The existence of the two parishes had always been an anomaly, and at last that anomaly was to be swept away, much to the advantage of the Henley-in-Arden benefice.

But there was a snag in the way. I have told you that the living of Henley-in-Arden was in the gift of the inhabitants. The living of Beaudesert was in the gift of the Lord Chancellor. Who was to be the patron of the two livings?

At last they arrived at a compromise, but it was suggested to my father that he should resign his living before the two were united. It was true that he was an old man as years go, but in mental and physical strength he was equal to any man of sixty. In proof of this I may mention that at ninety years of age he preached an extempore sermon in one of the most important churches in Oxford, and in between the ages of eighty and ninety he never shirked any work that came his way.

For example, one terrible night during the war there was a blizzard. The wind was blowing with gale force, sleet and snow were blinding the countryside, and huge trees were being torn from the earth all around the little home near Reigate where my aged parents then lived.

In the midst of this terrible storm and bitter cold, my father put on his hat and coat and walked a mile to take a week-night service for which he had made himself responsible. How he got there and back I cannot imagine. Amongst other difficulties, there was a steep hill to climb. And he was then nearly eighty-four years of age.

After the death of my mother—about whom I shall crave leave to say a word in a moment—my father left Reigate and went to live at Oxford with my eldest sister, who had married into the Church. Here we celebrated his ninetieth birthday, amid a rain of letters and telegrams and presents from his old parishioners at Henley-in-Arden. They had not forgotten him, nor did he ever forget them.

Had he lived to December 3, 1924, he would have been ninety-one. As it was, he died early in the morning of November 23 of that year—a Sunday morning. I had been with him until a late hour the previous night. We had been talking about a woman in Ireland who lived to the age of 114. At that moment, my wife entered the room.

“Hullo,” cried my father, in a strong voice. “Are you 114?”

Realising some week or two before this that his strength was leaving him, one of his last activities was to make a round of the Oxford shops to buy presents for some of the aged poor at Henley-in-Arden who were accustomed to hear from him at Christmas. His doctor told me that, on returning from this expedition, the old man nearly died in the street. But the poor had their presents.

He lies in Merstham churchyard, in the same grave

as my mother. A window to their memory—a very small one, at my father's own request—has been erected in the porch of his church at Henley-in-Arden, and his name has been added to the mural tablets in the parish church at Sutton, near Hull, where the names of his immediate ancestors—the Bells and the Howards—are commemorated.

A man is always more reticent in speaking of his mother than of his father. I don't know why this should be so, but so it is, and certainly does not imply less love or respect.

If my father was a hero to me, my mother was a heroine to all who knew the true story of her life.

She was the eldest daughter of Dr. Warren of Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, a man who had a medical practice extending for twenty miles around, employed four assistants, and kept many horses.

The family consisted of three girls and three boys. When my mother was twenty or thereabouts, her mother suddenly died, and my mother had to take her place as head of the house. With a man like my grandfather to please, this was no easy task.

A little later she married my father, and faced a hard life with undaunted courage and an unfailing sense of humour. I think I must admit that it was to her energies we owed such schooling as came our way. Despite the arrival of twelve children, with all that that implies for the wife of a poor country parson, she never lost sight of the fact that her family must be educated if they were to make their own way in life—and God knows there was nobody to make it for them.

She pulled all the strings that were within her reach,

and she triumphed. I do not think that is too strong a word. At any rate, she lived to see six of her eight daughters happily married—one died in infancy and one in girlhood—and her sons holding their own with varying degrees of success.

Her great grievance was my father's lack of "push." He simply would not "push." He detested the idea. Generously endowed by nature, as I have described, he never forgot the apostolic charge.

"And he charged them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only ; no bread, no wallet, no money in their purse ; but to go shod with sandals ; and, said he, put not on two coats."

My mother could not accept the literal interpretation of this charge. She would point out that the apostles were not taking ten children apiece along with them, and that even a clergyman owed a duty to this offspring.

"Make them cobblers," my father would say, cheerily ; and then put on his wideawake and go out to visit the sick and needy. For all that, he did write letters when he could justly claim benefits, the result being that all my three brothers had good school educations. (With my own jazz-like schooling I will deal in an early chapter).

The ambition of my mother's life was to live in a house surrounded by a gracious and beautiful garden. It was an ambition quite capable of being realised. All around us were vicarages and rectories with lovely gardens, and their temporary owners were in no way superior to my father. Indeed, when a good sermon was needed for a harvest festival or any other special occasion, they all asked for his services.

This ambition on my mother's part was not due to snobbery. She had a genuine passion for flowers and all beautiful out-of-door things. Not only could she make two flowers grow where only one grew before ; at her bidding, a hundred blossomed where none had hitherto flowered. She had the magic touch with flowers.

And yet, not until the late evening of her days did she have a decent garden. Their house at Reigate, I am thankful to say, stood in a charming old garden, but the gardens at Henley-in-Arden, both at the Old Vicarage and the present, were nothing more than town plots, rectangular and overlooked.

My mother lived to the age of seventy-four, and we laid her to rest in Merstham churchyard on a bitter day in the winter of 1917. I returned with my wife to London, and that night a fierce air-raid—one of the worst of the whole war—took place. I remember giving thanks in my heart that the poor old lady was free of all such madnesses for ever and ever.

CHAPTER II

VERY EARLY LOVES

I LEFT myself, at the age of nine months, travelling with the rest of the family from Basingstoke in Hampshire to Henley-in-Arden in the heart of Shakespeare's Warwickshire.

I had intended, in this chapter, to describe what I have called, for the sake of convenience, and that one may be readily understood of the younger generation, as my "jazz schooldays." But the training of a literary life-time is too strong for me. In writing fiction, it is an accepted axiom that you must get to the love-story with the least possible delay. This book is not fiction, but the axiom still holds good.

I first fell in love, then, at the age of seven. I am not quite sure, regarding this adventure in perspective, whether it was more an affair of the heart or the head. If the lady is still in the land of the living, and remembers anything about the matter, and chances across this book, I hope she will forgive me for saying that flattered vanity had a good deal to do with my affection for her.

She was the most perfect little girl the world has ever produced—perfect, not only in form and feature, but also in demeanour. She was always very clean and very neat, and never by any chance joined in rough games. I never saw her lose her temper, or cry; and

never heard her speak above a gently modulated undertone. She never forgot to say, "Please," or "Thank-you"; she never left home without her handkerchief; and she always pronounced her words syllable by syllable, as for instance, "bi-cy-*cle*"—the "y" being long as in "eye."

I cannot, I deeply regret to confess, remember much about her face, if anything. But I do remember her ringlets. These were the most fascinating decorations I had, up to that time, gazed upon. They were beautifully shaped, like small tubular bells, and they hung straight down on each side of her face. Perhaps that was why she never joined in any games. I think she must have been taught to live for her starched clothes, and her careful pronunciation, and her ringlets.

The passion of love, however, will play havoc even with so perfect a creature as this, and so carried away was she with my boyish adoration that she actually went to the extreme length of consenting to elope with me.

I forget why we thought it necessary to elope, since there was no barrier between us. We met freely, in public or private, just as we chose. So far as I am aware, I had no jealous rival, and she had none. Still, I suppose people sometimes elope for no particular reason beyond the romance of it, and that is precisely what we did.

We eloped on a Sunday, *after* the midday meal. (You see how masculine precaution asserted itself). At the back of the little town, to the eastward, there is a hill known as "The Mount." This spot was stuffed with romance, for there had been a castle on

the Mount in days gone by, and the castle was said to have been inhabited by no less a personage than Simon de Montfort, the genius who invented Parliaments. You can still trace the moat and the drawbridge and the tilting-ground.

We arranged to meet in the lane that led to this historic spot. We would then ascend the Mount, cross right over it, and continue indefinitely in that direction. We did not know in the least where we were going or how long it would take us. The world beyond the Mount was a sealed book. It was all very thrilling.

“Now,” I said, after impressing upon the lady the necessity for absolute secrecy, “what about provisions?”

She made no reply. I think she thought the subject rather coarse.

“Have *you* any provisions?” I persisted.

She shook her head, and the ringlets swayed like Canterbury bells in the summer breeze. They always did when she shook her head, which may have accounted for her negative tastes and habits.

“Well, we can’t elope without provisions,” I went on, brutally. “What are you going to have for dinner?”

She said she didn’t know! Fancy not knowing what you were going to have for dinner on a Sunday!

“I know what we’re going to have,” I said. “We’re going to have hot roast beef, and Yorkshire pudding, and potatoes, and cabbages, and after dinner I shall get an orange. I’ll bring my orange and some lump sugar. What will you bring?”

Once more she made the ringlets oscillate noise-

lessly. If I had not been so set on eloping, I should have lost my temper with the woman.

“Can you get hold of some biscuits?” I demanded.

She nodded. And so we parted, to meet later in the lane that led to the Mount. All proceeded according to plan. We met in the lane, and I at once asked her, in a low, earnest tone, vibrating with emotion, if she had brought the biscuits. She said she had, so we left without further delay for the horizon.

We climbed the Mount with brave hearts. There was nobody about as yet, and we had often climbed it before. As a rule, we would linger on the summit, jumping three times in and three times out of the “Money Hole,” and then looking in it for money, which was never there unless you persuaded some grown-up person to put it there before you began to jump.

On this Sunday afternoon, however, we did not bother about money. We had our provisions, our youth, and our love; the world seemed easy to conquer.

Having descended the Mount on the far side, I deemed it prudent to call a halt for rest and refreshment. So we sat down, and I ate the orange. The lady refused to share it because the juice might spirtle on her dress and stain it. I could see from this alone that she would make the ideal partner for life’s pilgrimage. I promised to eat all oranges.

We then shared the biscuits, eloping being hungry work as everybody knows who has ever eloped. Just as the last biscuit was finished, the church clock struck four.

“What time do you have your tea?” I asked.

“ Five o’clock,” she said, looking at me through the ringlets.

“ So do we,” I replied. “ Never mind ! Come on !”

We began to breast the hill that concealed the outer world. It was a steepish hill. (I forgot to mention that I was dressed as a sailor, and had a round cap with “ H.M.S. Victory ” on it. I also had a knotted blue handkerchief, and a whistle at the end of a white cord. I regret to say that for three years after this event I continued to masquerade as a sailor, despite the fact that I was destined for the Church. I often think a little clerical suit would have been more appropriate).

Halfway up the hill we stopped, and looked each other in the eye.

“ I shall want my tea at five,” I said. “ Won’t you?”

She nodded.

“ Where shall we get it ?”

She shook her head.

“ How would it be if we went back now and eloped another day ?”

She nodded and almost smiled. It was a humiliating finish to what might have been a glorious romance. Be that as it may, we went back at a round pace and were just in time for tea. At any rate, I was.

I can’t remember anything about her after that. I think her mother must have removed her from my dangerous neighbourhood.

I was destined not to fall in love again until I was twelve. Five long years with an empty heart ! It seems incredible, but I cannot fill them up with any women that linger in my memory.

At twelve, being then at school, I fell in love with a

banker's daughter. It was not, I protest, the money in her father's bank that won my love. That would have been just the same if the bank had broken. Indeed, I often hoped the bank *would* break so that she and I might become nearer to each other by reason of her adversity. I tried hard to induce some of the other fellows to join with me in a run on the bank—about which I had read in “Ready Money Mortiboy,” by Besant and Rice. They all refused. They said you had to have money in the bank before you could run on it—a pusillanimous piece of casuistry. The fact was, the girl had never troubled to glance in their directions.

But she had glanced at me a good deal, and very upsetting I found it. Church was her favourite place. We used to sit at right angles to the main isle; the vicar's maiden sisters were immediately opposite, and she sat behind the vicar's sisters.

The vicar's sisters were extremely pious—quite the most pious women I had encountered up to that date. This helped in a way, because when they lowered their heads in prayer I could get in jolly good work between them. Sometimes they would look up at the wrong moment, and I would meet astonished, gazelle-like gazes. But I do not remember that the passion which must have blazed in my eyes ever called a blush to the cheeks of the vicar's sisters. It would have been awful to foster a hope that could never be realised!

The banker's daughter had two brothers at the school. They were day-boys, and I was awfully nice to them. I never sent an actual message to my love, not being certain if she would get it or whether it would become public property. But I tried to convey by my

manner that there was a certain reason why I considered these youths strangely privileged people, and, quite apart from that, far superior to any of the other day-boys. I rather fancy this conduct had its effect.

She must have heard about it. On certain days we had leave to visit the town, and I invariably made straight for the bank. It was a solid, even handsome house, built in—I think—the Georgian style. That is to say, it had two flat windows each side of the front door, and five flat windows on the first floor, and five more windows, also flat, on the second floor.

I have carefully enumerated all these windows because they added to the excitement. I could never be sure from which window she would peep. Not, of course, from the ground-floor windows, because on that floor her entirely unworthy father carried on the sordid business of banking. I never so much as glanced at the ground floor. But with any of the remaining ten windows there was a sporting chance. I used to walk very slowly past the bank, scanning all the ten windows like a sailor sweeping the horizon with his glass. Sometimes she would peep out, and sometimes she would not. It was awful having to keep moving. I wished I could dress myself up as an itinerant musician, and stand opposite the bank for hours, playing a tin whistle. But then, on the other hand, her father might not have liked it. He might have got his sums wrong, and sent for a policeman, and given me in charge for impeding bankers in the execution of their duty.

After dragging its slow length for quite two terms, during which I never once exchanged a single word with the damsel, this impassioned affair came to a

sudden and a violent end. I doubt if any love affair ever had so extraordinary a conclusion.

Immediately opposite the bank there was a lamp-post. One afternoon, being on that day more than usually in love, I determined to scan the ten windows with such a penetrating glance that my adored would be drawn to one of them by the sheer power of the eye.

I was in the very act of executing this plan, and had worked off nine of the windows without any result, when, without the slightest warning, I received a most terrific blow on the head ! It was the kind of blow that robs you of your senses for the time being. You crumple up. I have been hit on the head by a cricket-ball in full flight ; I have been pitched on to my head off a high bicycle ; but I never remember quite so terrible a blow as this one.

The explanation was very simple. Blinded by the ardour of my gaze at the enchanted windows, I had walked smack into the lamp-post.

When I came to my senses—which I did, thank heaven, without falling down—I looked swiftly about me to see if anybody had witnessed this humiliating incident. To all appearances, nobody had. The ten windows were still lifeless ; the banker and his creatures were still huddling vilely over their gold ; the street was empty.

I walked on, and a great rage took possession of my youthful soul. My love, in an instant, had turned to hate. It was all her fault, the silly cat ! Why couldn't she be on view when she was required ? Who was she, anyway, to keep a man hanging about opposite her house when he might be more profitably employed

getting the utmost value in chocolates for a penny? Come to think of it, she wasn't even pretty! And, anyhow, my head hurt like the devil!

I never loved her again after that. As for her brothers, they must have been quite at a loss to understand my change of demeanour. I became as cold as ice towards them. After all, they were only "day-bugs," and as such ranked with rats, stoats, weasels, and other vermin born to be hunted and ruthlessly exterminated. For the rest of the term I headed the "anti-day-bug" raids, and every afternoon swept the playground free of all such intruders.

I vowed, moreover, never again to fall in love. I looked up "misogynist" in the dictionary, and found it meant a hater of the female sex. I decided to be one of those. I read "Vanity Fair" from cover to cover, and talked like Thackeray. I even wrote a very bitter little poem, which concluded, I remember, as follows:

"Those whom God hath joined together,
Man will manage to divide."

That represents my state of mind right up to the end of that term. And then, in the holidays, I fell in love again.

This was a very much more serious affair; indeed, but for three others which followed, I think it would have been the most serious affair of my life.

You must get it firmly fixed in your mind, if you please, that she was really lovely. That is not a word to be used lightly, and it is a word I seldom use myself. But here it was justified.

I will try to describe her. I know I am not good at descriptions of feminine loveliness, and that is why in

my stories I usually call the girl Daphne or Celia or June, and leave the rest to the reader. They can do it so much better than the author. The name, if you are careful to select the right name, conveys everything needful to the imagination. If you call a girl Daphne, for example, every reader knows in a flash what she is like. All Daphnes have the same qualities. Then why waste time and labour saying she is dark when the reader wants her to be fair? Those who have done me the honour to peruse my humble works will have observed that, after about my third book, I never described the heroine at all. And yet I had no complaints on that score from either publishers or readers.

But this wondrous creature must be described—if I can do it. I shall certainly not do her justice.

Her most noticeable feature was her hair. Her hair was her glory. It was very long, very fair, and very luxuriant. It hung in rippling waves all down her back, far beyond her waist; it hung in rippling waves over both shoulders in front. You couldn't miss it. You could tell her a mile off by this cloud of glory. One of my sisters, who didn't like the girl, said her hair was artificially waved, and had to be put in rags every night. I refused to believe it. I would not picture her to myself with her hair in rags. I insisted that it waved naturally, and I shall continue to think so. Besides, it was open to all the other girls in the village to wear rags at night if they could do anything with them, yet not one of them came within a thousand miles of having hair like that!

In addition to this hair, which was enough in itself to overthrow a fellow, she had very large, violet eyes.

They were wonderful eyes—rather sad, but all the more appealing for that. Then she had a pink-and-white complexion, white even teeth, long eyelashes, and a neck that would have made the Hellespont look like a second-class canal. Swum the Hellespont? My good sir, I would have jumped it to get to her had she beckoned to me from the other side!

As to her figure, I was not an expert on the feminine figure in those days—to-day we all are; we cannot help ourselves—but I know that she was as slim as a sylph, wore rather long skirts, and moved like a racing yacht in a light breeze.

I had known her by sight for years and years, of course, but I never really fell in love with her until those holidays after the incident with the lamp-post. Nor do I remember how it began—unless a parish party did the trick.

These parish parties were invented by my mother, who had a genius for organisation and an insatiable appetite for innocent gaiety. They were held in the Board Schools, that being the most suitable building for the purpose. Any body could come to the whole party by paying a shilling, or if you liked to wait till a certain hour, and just come for the dancing, you could get in for sixpence.

The entertainment consisted of games, music, and dancing. There were “light refreshments,” consisting chiefly of still lemonade, sponge-cakes, tea, coffee, blanc-mange, and oranges cut up into small portions. Most of the refreshments cost a penny a go, and it was the correct thing to urge your partner to refresh herself after each dance. By carefully abstaining yourself, and just sitting by whilst she toyed with a piece of orange

or nibbled a sponge-cake, you could make a shilling last the best part of the evening.

At intervals a halt would be called in the wild merriment, and somebody would get on a little platform at the end of the big room and sing a song or recite. In those days, my mother was convinced that I was a vocalist, and the wretched people had to hear me sing or incur her displeasure. I must admit that they stood it wonderfully well. I was not then, as I subsequently became, an avowed comic singer. I used to sing “The Hunting Day,” and “Soldiers of the Queen,” and things like that. I know *I* didn’t like it, and I can’t imagine that anybody else did ; but, combined with reading the lessons in church, these performances taught me to face an audience without overwhelming tremors. (For a young man, reading the lessons in a good-sized church is the finest possible training for acting or public speaking).

Well, here we are at a parish party. I am in a very high collar and very prominent cuffs, and the vision of loveliness is in pale blue, with long white gloves, and her hair waving and rippling all down and around her like another—but perfectly respectable—“she.”

I approach her and ask for the pleasure of a dance. She graciously consents. We stand up, and I beat time with my foot until the moment arrives to glide away with her. She does not dance ; she floats. She is the lightest thing imaginable. One knows that one could dance with her for ever and never get tired. We do, in point of fact, dance with her six times in an evening—a course of conduct extremely reprehensible in a son of the vicar, who is not at the parish party for his own enjoyment but to give pleasure to the parishioners.

From time to time, our dream of bliss is interrupted. We are sent for, and bidden to dance with a mother of eight. She is a very large and heavy lady, but we do our youthful best. She seems to like the exercise. We are wondering how long the dance will last, and why she feels so hard round the waist. At last we stop these dignified gyrations. We thank her. She says, "A pleasure, I'm sure, Master Jack," and honour is satisfied. (Churlishly, we do not invite her to indulge in sponge-cake).

The instant the music recommences—one fiddle and a piano—we glide swiftly to the side of the vision of loveliness. How is it that anything in this world can be so beautiful, so soft, so sweet-scented, so gentle, so wistful? We dance with her for the fourth time, and the girls who are not dancing whisper together and giggle as we pass. We do not mind in the least. We are not on earth at all.

Comes two o'clock in the morning, and the party ends. There are no cabs in our village, and the street-lamps are extinguished at eleven sharp.

We say: "May I see you home?"

The vision replies: "I—I don't know. I expect mother will be waiting for me."

We say, very boldly: "Can't we give her the slip?"

The vision replies: "I—I'll try. Wait outside."

We go out into the night. It is as dark as pitch. Everybody is saying how dark it is.

She comes out. The darkness swallows us. We take her arm. It is bare and soft above the elbow. This is too much. We cannot speak.

We stumble over the cobbles. The vision says, "Oh, dear!" We enquire if she is hurt. The very

notion that she may be hurt is too awful ! She is not hurt. It was her silly heel. ("Silly" heel, indeed ! Adored heel !)

We near her home. We hear voices. She says it is mother. Mother and other encumbrances waiting for her outside her home.

Her mother calls out, "Is that you?" rather crossly. Our heart bleeds.

The vision replies, very meekly : "Yes, mother."

Mother calls : "What a long time you've been ! Hurry up !"

We part. Just one glimpse of those violet eyes, shining through the darkness of the night, and she is gone...

A door slams. We are alone in the black velvet of the night. There will not be another parish party this winter, but we do not mind. We feel that we have advanced in favour. Besides, are there not the fields, and the woods, and even 'the village street ? And church ?

This was romance. You can laugh at it if you like, but romance it was. Not every youth has such romance in his life. To begin with, there must be a vision of loveliness, and they are rare. Indeed, I doubt if there was ever another anywhere. Then you must be something of a poet. And, finally, you must spend your youth in Arden, the sweetest setting in the world for a love-story.

CHAPTER III

I GO TO SCHOOL

I HAVE mentioned, I think, that the courtesy vicarage was sandwiched between a large red-brick dwelling and “The King’s Head” public-house. In days gone by, the owner of the red-brick dwelling must have been a masterful fellow, for he had actually burrowed a way to his backyard right underneath the principal bedroom of our house. Anyone sleeping in that room could hear, from time to time, a rumbling that resembled the noise made by the underground railway. This was our neighbour’s wheelbarrow, going to and fro from the street to the backyard.

The occupant of this important residence, when we arrived at the vicarage, was a very old gentleman named Cooper. “Old Tom Cooper” was his customary designation, and I never heard him called Thomas Cooper by anybody in the town.

Old Tom Cooper was *not* a masterful person. *He* would never have burrowed through his neighbour’s house to get to his own backyard. He was a gentle old soul, extremely poor (for which I love him), and supported himself and an elderly maiden sister by keeping pigs and teaching very small children to read and write.

I am not sure which paid him the better, but I fancy it must have been the pigs, because his first and

freshest hour was always devoted to feeding these animals. We would dash up the passage that ran beneath our own house, punctually at nine each morning, and invariably found old Tom Cooper staggering up the steps from his backyard to the pigsty with a bucket of the most horrible concoction one could imagine. The feeding of the pigs never failed to fascinate us. We would stand round the sty in a breathless semi-circle—myself, aged six ; an elder brother, aged eight ; and a little girl and a little boy from the village who answered to the names of Percy and Pet—whilst old Tom Cooper poured the filthy pig-wash into the troughs and calculated what he was going to make, bless him, out of the result.

The old man took a very kindly interest in my first efforts, and prophesied that I should one day “make a name” for myself. I stayed at that school three years, and at the end of each year received a prize. The first was called, “The Basket of Flowers” ; the second, “Always Happy”—a title which never failed to amuse the family ; and the third, “The Prince of the House of David.” I am dreadfully ashamed to say that in later years I disposed of the first two for a very small sum to the village librarian, who happened to be my eldest sister. But the third I still have, and it lies on my table as I write, with a very neat inscription written by the old gentleman in his best copper-plate. “A Reward for general Improvement in his Studies : Midsr. 1884.”

With that third prize ended my scholastic career under old Tom Cooper, and I wish all my other masters had been as kind and as conscientious, and all my other schooldays as happy.

Though I little dreamed it when I dashed home with "The Prince of the House of David," I was soon to experience unhappiness. And it began, as unhappiness so easily may, with a happiness that was almost delirious.

One of my mother's sisters had married a doctor who had a good practice in a certain country town in one of the home counties. My mother announced to me one day that she was about to visit this sister, and I, even little I, was to accompany her !

I don't think it was a plot. I refuse to think it was a plot. I believe my mother wanted a companion for the journey, and had no ulterior motive in making me that companion. Had I known what was to be the upshot of this visit, I think I should have done something very desperate instead of scrambling so eagerly into the old wagonette that used to convey us to the station, four miles away, at a bob a nob—children under twelve sixpence. (After I turned twelve, I had to do the journey on foot).

Well, we were off ! My transports could not be repressed ! I remember darting from one side of the third-class compartment to the other, terrified lest I should miss some object of interest by lingering too long at either window. There were other people in the compartment, but they did not seem to mind. I fancy that travellers in those days must have been better-tempered than those of the present day.

There was one unfortunate incident on the journey. My mother possessed a fur muff by which she set great store. Indeed, so did we all, for when our little hands were frozen with cold we used to thrust them into the warm muff, and soon they were burning hot.

In changing from one train to another—we had to change three times—the muff was left behind ! Great was the consternation ! Enquiries were made, and telegrams sent by kind-hearted officials. Late that evening, just as I was going to bed, the muff returned to its owner. I can remember flinging myself upon it and nearly weeping for joy at its recovery. I know that my cousins, of whom there were five, all laughed at me for a very foolish and excitable fellow. They were doubtless right.

Never shall I forget my first night in that—to me, by comparison—palatial home. Two things impressed themselves upon my imagination, and one of them still reminds me of that night—a jet of gas that burned all night on the landing outside my door, and the smell of a certain famous soap. This soap smells to-day exactly as it did all those years ago, and the shape of the tablets is the same.

My mother's visit lasted a fortnight, and I naturally presumed that I should return home with her. But this was not to be. I was informed that it had been arranged for me to stay a “little longer,” and it was just hinted that I might accompany my cousins to a school which I had already visited on the occasion of a party, and where I won a stuffed elephant in a raffle.

My dear mother went off alone in the train, therefore, and a small boy of nine waved her a wistful good-bye from the station platform. Almost immediately after her departure, the blow fell. I was informed that I was not to go to school with my cousins, one of whom, the eldest boy, was only a few months younger than myself, but to the local grammar school !

My consternation was intense. I should not see my

home until Christmas, an eternity away, and I should have to wear a "mortar-board" with my sailor suit ! Here were two definite and real tragedies. I refused at first to believe in my evil fate. I thought these grown-up people would repent of their cruelty, and either allow me to return home, or, at the very least, comport myself with dignity as a sailor. (Oh, you grown-ups, what do you understand of the sensitive youthful mind?)

But they meant it. They bought me a mortar-board and they put it on my head, and told me to go along to the great school at the far end of the street. When the fateful morning arrived, I refused to go. I locked myself into a secret apartment, and remained there until a deceitful maid coaxed me into unlocking the door by pretending that the terror was over and gone. Delilah ! Jezebel ! Hired traitress ! She was the first woman to shake my confidence in her sex.

In the end, of course, I had to go to the grammar school, and I not only stayed till Christmas but till the following Christmas as well. I was not unhappy at school, but I was very unhappy in my uncle's house. Let me not wrong him. After all, he had five children of his own to provide for, and he could not be expected to take a mere nephew by marriage to his heart.

Mealtimes were especially terrible for me. How I loathed my meals ! I knew that I was an intruder, and had no right to the food which had been provided for the family. My pride was wounded to the quick. But what could I do ? What redress had I ? I was only nine years of age, and a boy of nine must, God help him, eat.

Looking back, it seems strange to me that never

once, in all that year and a half, did I have a half-holiday. There were two half-holidays each week, on Wednesday and on Saturday. If your marks were very good, the whole afternoon was yours. If not so good, you lost half-an-hour or an hour. If still worse, to stay in the schoolroom the entire afternoon was your portion.

I do not think my work could have been so very bad. Old Tom Cooper had never found it so. Indeed, he looked on me as his hardest-working and most promising pupil. At the grammar school, the boys in my form were not so remarkable for intelligence. I was always somewhere near the top, and yet I never had a half-holiday in a year and a half, or even half a half-holiday. What was the reason?

The form of punishment on these occasions was really wicked. It must have been invented either by a fool or a fiend. I am sure my form-master did not invent it, for he was a most kindly soul ; but the poor man had to inflict it or lose his job.

It was called, “cube roots.” You were given a number of figures, the number depending on the enormity of your offence. We will suppose the figures written on your slate were “854937.” Beneath these you again wrote “854937,” and you first had to multiply the top line by the lower line. This being achieved, with tears and a vile headache, you then multiplied the *result* by “854937.” One mistake, of course, ruined the whole affair, and you had to start afresh. Not until your “cube root” was finished and “proved” could you take your fagged little body and brain into the fresh air and the afternoon sunlight.

I was quite hopeless at the job. My slate was a mass

of figures and smudges, but never once, in all that long series of half-holidays spent in school, did I get a "cube root" right.

Those culprits whose crimes were too heinous to be expiated by cube roots had to pass through an ordeal which was known, euphemistically, as "showing up your marks." This really meant that on Monday mornings, in the presence of the whole school, you reported yourself to the headmaster as an impious and hopeless person. Whereupon the headmaster would unlock a sliding cupboard at the back of him—I can still see that sinister door smoothly sliding back—and produce a cane about four feet in length. Each impious and hopeless person would then be required in turn to hold out his hand, and the headmaster would aim a series of swishing blows at the extended member.

Now, this may sound a very simple procedure. There are those who will smile at the description, and there are others who will complacently assert that such punishments are "very wholesome." But they never saw this headmaster, they never saw his victims, and they never knew the true inwardness of the punishments.

Neither did I. I often wondered why it was that I, the nephew of the chief doctor in the town, and a person who never earned a half-holiday, was not caned; whilst a very small boy in my form, whose father was in India, who boarded at the school, and who was always covered with ink from top to toe, had his little hands so smitten with that cane each Monday morning that they were swollen up to twice their natural size, whereby he was unable to hold pen or pencil for many hours.

I have forgotten the name of this small boy, and I have forgotten the name of the headmaster. I remember the latter as a tall man, very thin, very pale, on whose face no smile or gleam of tenderness, so far as I can recollect, ever appeared. I remember the former as a forlorn little wretch, cheerful enough when he was not in tears after a caning, his collar always unfastened at the back, his face, and his hands, and his clothes always, as I say, covered with ink. I have no doubt he was a sore trial to the wife of the head, but that, I hope, had nothing to do with these weekly canings for "bad marks."

I am rather stressing this point for the benefit of the "very wholesome" propagandists. The punishment was cumulative. That is to say, on the second Monday of the term you might escape with one stroke. If you presented yourself on the third Monday, two strokes. And so on until you got to a dozen or more strokes, delivered with all the force of a strong man six feet in height. "Very wholesome."

My unfortunate little class-mate was in front of that desk every Monday as regularly as the clock. He would bear the first few strokes pretty well, thrusting out first one hand and then the other. But when the pain became too intense to be borne he could hardly bring himself to extend the lacerated hand for further punishment. This would enrage the headmaster. I can see his white face now glaring down at the quivering child, who was little more than a baby, and can hear the stern command :

"Hold out your hand! Hold it out further! Further still!"

Sobbing, shrinking, trembling all over, the defence-

less child would at last extend the purple hand. Down would come the great cane with a swish that could be heard from one end of the great schoolroom to the other, and a cry of agony would go to heaven, whence, perhaps, the child's mother looked down on the scene. Such is my chief memory of that school.

“Very wholesome.”

I have been birched myself on the bare flesh till blood was drawn with every cut, but I did not mind that. I thought it rather a lark, and felt a bit of a hero. It did not affect me one-tenth as much as the scenes I have just described. Nor did it make the slightest difference to my general conduct. I know that the master who administered the birching sank rapidly in my estimation, and I have seldom seen a man look such a fool as he did when the job was over. But that was another school and another kind of head-master.

There is only one sort of boy who benefits from birching, or swishing, or caning, or flogging, or whatever you like to call it, and that is the bully. The bully, who is the potential murderer, especially the murderer of women and children and the torturer of dumb animals, is always a coward. He is always cherishing his own skin. Flog him enough and he may learn to sympathise in some small degree with the sufferings of others.

But my experience is that the bully is the one person who escapes corporal punishment or any other kind of punishment—unless he goes so far that the law is compelled to attend to him. The bully is usually a large person, and takes advantage of that. Head-masters do not care to flog boys nearly as big as them-

selves, and the world is shy of chastising bullies who are big enough to retaliate on the world.

Of all the loathsome creatures in this world, the bully is the filthiest. Flogging was meant for them, and for them alone. I earnestly pray that these feeble words of mine may go forth into the world, and may do something—as much as one man can—to lessen the sufferings of those defenceless creatures, whether human or otherwise, whose destinies bring them into contact with the bully.

Towards the end of my fourth term at this grammar school, my uncle informed me one day at the mid-day meal that I was shortly to be “Changed into a little girl.” What this meant I had no idea, but at the age of ten I strongly resented the implication. I suppose I showed my resentment by getting red in the face; anyway, the joke persisted right up the to time when I left that shelter, never to return to it.

The explanation was this. The headmaster and proprietor of a certain school near Rugby—a preparatory school, of course—had two young daughters. He had lighted upon the sound scheme of placing these girls in a clergyman’s family to be educated with the daughters of the clergyman, whilst, in exchange, he received one of the parson’s boys into his school without fee.

A sound scheme, as I say, but for human nature. Schoolmasters are as human as other people, especially in the matter of fees, and it is difficult for a man to forget, when he is cutting beef for a certain lad, that the unfortunate wretch is bringing him in nothing in the shape of actual cash. He will not smile quite so pleasantly at that boy, nor help him quite so gene-

rously as the boy who pays him a round hundred pounds a year. That is human nature. And in the tiny world of school, underlings quickly take their cue from the headmaster.

However, I had nothing to do with that, and so, at the age of ten, I found myself one of some thirty boys at this school near Rugby. The prospectus contained a list of clothing and other articles that each boy must be provided with, and especial attention was paid to Sunday raiment, the boys being then on show at the village church.

In addition to Eton suits, every boy had to bring with him a top-hat or bowler, an umbrella, and a pair of gloves. The boys with the top-hats walked first in the crocodile, and the boys with the bowlers behind, the hats getting shabbier towards the end of the crocodile. My place was last of all. And I will tell you why.

In the first chapter of this record, I have endeavoured to show that my father had a great scorn for all outward show—what in these days are called “frills.” His scorn may be imagined when informed that a boy ten years of age must be provided with a silk or bowler hat, an umbrella, and a pair of kid gloves. Still, a rule was a rule, and he had to comply with it. But not riotously or extravagantly.

We bought the bowler hat and the umbrella in Leamington, at which town I had to change on my way to school. The bowler, I remember, cost eighteen pence. I was rather surprised, even at that tender age, that it should be possible to purchase a new bowler for eighteen-pence, but the feat was accomplished. After the first shower of rain the hat turned a lovely

shade of green. It had a rather wide brim, and rested on my ears.

I forget the exact price of the umbrella, but it was either elevenpence-halfpenny or one-and-elevenpence-halfpenny. It was not, in any case, intended for schoolboy use, having a round nob for a handle, this nob being ingeniously decorated with Japanese symbols.

The kid gloves we obtained before leaving home. They had originally belonged to one of my sisters—I believe a younger sister—and it was quite out of the question for me to get them on, or even half on. In fact, there was no pretence about the matter. I was told to carry them in my hand, and carry them I did, every Sunday morning, to the church and back again. Picture me in the green bowler, with the Japanese umbrella, carrying shrivelled gloves. No wonder they put me at the tail of the crocodile !

The worst of it all was that these hats, umbrellas, and gloves were laid on a table in the hall before church, and we had to advance, one by one as our names were called out, and select our own gear. How I dreaded that moment ! The horror of claiming that hat, umbrella, and those gloves is with me to this day ! Even the masters used to enjoy the fun.

But I was never lucky in the matter of gloves. At the age of fifteen—by this time I was at another school, but I may as well record the painful story while I think of it—I was a candidate for confirmation. The town was a very churchy one, and the confirmation a tremendous affair. It took place in the evening, and there were hundreds of candidates. All the males were on one side of the main aisle and all the females on the other side. So important was the ceremony that we

were rehearsed in the church some days previous to the event.

Rather to my consternation, I was placed in the front pew and to the right of it. This meant that I had to lead off when our turn came to walk through the choir and up to the chancel-steps. On the very day of the confirmation, somebody said :

“Have you got your white gloves ?”

“White gloves !” I cried. “Of course not !”

“Well, you’d better hop down town and get some. We all have to wear white gloves to-night.”

How I raised the money I don’t remember, but I rushed down to the town and asked for white gloves at every likely shop. There were none to be had. The other candidates had bought them all up !

Here was a pretty pickle for the leading boy ! Seeing my desperation, one draper suggested that I should wear ladies’ gloves. They had long sleeves, of course, but he said I could tuck the sleeves up my arms.

And this is what I did. I shall never forget the misery of those gloves. To make matters worse, we had all been given a large number of little books and pamphlets to be read at various points of the service. My good angel must have kept very close to me that night, for I got through without disgracing myself.

Returning to the preparatory school, it was here that I really began the main study of my life, namely, mankind. I suppose I learnt things out of books. I know I came out at the top of my class—which caused great annoyance to at least two of my instructors—and walked off with the prize at the end of the year. But I was far more interested in my teacher than in my books,

and this baleful habit has lasted throughout my life up to the present day.

I doubt if small boys who study their elders intently, albeit respectfully, are ever thoroughly popular. I know that I was often rebuked at home, much to my surprise, for studying the parsons and other visitors who came to the house.

“ You mustn’t stare at people like that ! ” I was told. “ You never took your eyes off Mr. So-and-So all the time he was here ! The poor man was quite embarrassed ! ”

A very bad and a very rude habit, but I cannot help it. I do it quite unconsciously. Not so many years ago, I was introduced, at a London club, to one of our most eminent writers. Oh, a very eminent writer indeed. We lunched at the same table, and he remarked to somebody afterwards that I had looked at him as though I were going to paint his portrait. Well, perhaps I shall some day. I may even do it in this book.

At the preparatory school my studies chiefly concentrated on the headmaster, his maiden sister, and the senior assistant master. None of them was beautiful, or even comely, but they were all of great interest.

The headmaster was very fat, very red-faced, and had either a wooden leg or one that was permanently stiff. He had an enormous appetite, and there was a legend among the boys to the effect that after dinner he had a second and much larger dinner served to him in his own private room. I don’t know if this was true, but he certainly looked like it.

I had an astonishing instance one morning of the uncertainty of the human disposition. The head was

taking a Divinity class, a subject which came very easily to me. He was asking questions in the ordinary way, and we were all answering to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Quite suddenly, and for no reason that I could fathom, or ever have fathomed, he flew into a violent rage with my unfortunate self, snatched up a long ruler, and told me to hold out my hand. I held it out all right, and he broke the ruler across it. He then yelled at me to go and sit down at my desk.

“For two pins,” he stormed, “I’d go into the garden, cut a stick, and half beat the life out of you! I’ve done it before now and I’m inclined at this moment to do it again!”

The other boys were just as astonished as myself. When we talked the matter over afterwards, nobody could think of anything I had done to annoy him. I can only imagine that he was liverish, and happened to remember that I was paid for in “kind.” But I do know that no man with an ungovernable temper of that sort has any business in the scholastic profession.

This gentleman’s sister used to teach us French and music. French was another of my pet subjects, and all her ingenuity could not shift me from the top of the class. She even made a grievance of it, imploring the other boys to “take me down.” They all had a try, but not one succeeded. It was really too simple. Without, of course, knowing French, I could read the silly little French books they gave us as easily as though they were English. It is only a knack to read any language. I know hardly a word of Italian, but the first evening I found myself in Rome I picked up an Italian newspaper and read the leader aloud without

any difficulty. To write and speak a language is quite another matter.

Anyway, the good lady got her own back, so to speak, when she gave me my music lesson. This lasted half-an-hour, and took place in a bitterly cold drawing-room. The piano had yellow notes and a crinkly silk front.

My spinster friend would take up a strategic position on the right or left flank, and she was always armed with a very long, thick pencil. I believe she had these pencils specially made, the idea being to point to the note to be struck by the performer on the instrument. I was not clever at this, preferring to play by ear. As often as I struck the wrong note, down would come the pencil on my chilled fingers. How this method could help one to learn and love the piano, I know not. To make matters worse, my lesson nearly always coincided with refreshment-time. Not my refreshment-time, but the lady's. She must have had great fun, sipping milk, munching seed-cake, and hitting a small, very cold boy on the knuckles with a giant pencil.

But the worst of the three objects of my attention was certainly the senior assistant-master. (The junior master was a brick and a great pal). This person had a pasty-white face, covered all over with very yellow freckles. His hands were also covered with freckles, but they were not so white, although invariably clammy.

My freckled friend had a very simple method of keeping me away from the top of the class. He would put another boy there, and keep him there whether he answered the questions put to him or not. Boys are

great lovers of justice, and this did not seem to us just. I know I hated the boy in question, and we had at least one glorious fight which should have ended fatally, but was stopped just as we were strangling each other.

I was not in a position to tackle the master in the same way, so I boldly recorded my impressions of him on a door in the playground that had recently been painted white. I believe my criticism were pointed out to him almost as soon as recorded, but he kept me on tenterhooks for weeks before taking his revenge.

He would steal out of the schoolroom by the door that led to the playground, and come back with a very evil look on his face. The look would be directed at me. My friends trembled for me, and begged me to erase my records. But I would not. What I had written, I had written. My small soul revolted against the rank caddishness of the man.

It was a Sunday afternoon when the blow fell. A very fine Sunday afternoon, which we were spending in the headmaster's garden. Presently I heard my name being called. A chum of mine rushed up and told me, breathlessly, that the master had seen the door and asked who did it. Another boy had told him, and he was looking for me.

I got up and went to meet him. I felt that whatever was going to happen had better happen quickly. I had been kept in suspense long enough.

We met just inside the playground, a spot invisible from any of the windows. Without even asking me whether I had done the deed, he hit me a tremendous blow on the side of the head. As I was falling, he hit me another blow on the other side, and so went

on until he thought it better, I suppose, to stop. He then took care that I should be kept out of observation for the rest of the day.

I have often wondered if this fellow is in the land of the living. I would like to meet him. I suppose he would be some ten years older than myself, but even that should not make him senile.

When he assaulted me, I was a small boy of ten or eleven. I am now six foot two, in pretty good condition, and my rowing weight is thirteen stone ten. In other words, the tables have probably turned a little in my favour.

I heard that he was subsequently expelled at short notice from this preparatory school. But the wrong was done when he was ever placed in such a position. I wonder if private school masters are any more careful to-day? Here, if you like, is an open profession—open to anybody!

Before I remove the reader from this preparatory school, I should like to record two incidents which dwell more pleasantly in my memory.

The building itself was really a good-sized country house. There were no dormitories, but the boys were divided up among the various bedrooms, about six boys to each room. Naturally, a sort of feud was perpetually maintained between the rooms, and we nightly fought for the supremacy.

One night, in the summer term, I was in the thick of the fray, clad only in a night-shirt, when the head's sister—the Lady of the Large Pencil—suddenly appeared. This meant trouble and plenty of it. We all crept into our beds, wondering what would happen on the morrow.

And a very curious thing did happen. Somehow or another, it was discovered that I had developed a "rash." School-keeping people are always terrified of epidemics, and I was forthwith bundled off to a delightful cottage in the village where an old lady lived who was some sort of relative of the head. I don't think she can have been a sister. This world could scarcely produce two sisters so dissimilar.

For two weeks this old lady and myself lead a life of enchantment. We rose at a respectable hour, had a splendid breakfast, passed the morning in performing light tasks, had a splendid dinner, read books, had a wonderful tea, and then played cribbage. I had never before played cribbage, and I have never played it since, but I know that I became in that fortnight quite a formidable opponent for the old lady.

She was kindness itself, and, although I was only twelve years of age by this time, the peace of that cottage and her life sank into my childish heart.

But I was not happy. For a whole year I had been striving for the prize which was to be given at the end of this term. Every mark obtained in this year counted for the prize. It was a prolonged test, and I had tried uncommonly hard not to lose marks.

Yet a rumour reached me that, contrary to custom, I was not to be allowed an "average" on account of illness, the reason being that I had incurred my illness by breaking a rule, namely, being out of my bedroom in a night-shirt. A noble idea!

When at last the rash disappeared—a false alarm, of course—and I returned to the school, I was met in the hall by the head.

"I am told," he said, not by any means unkindly,

“ that you are no longer going to try for your form prize.”

I assured him that the information was correct.

“ And why not ?” he continued.

I pointed out that a loss of a fortnight’s marks must prove fatal, added to which I had not received fair play from the man with the freckles.

He told me to go ahead and not worry. I did so, and at last we came to the final evening of the term. The examinations were all over ; the boxes were packed ; I was leaving for good and all.

We assembled in the dining-hall for the prize-giving. I was not particularly interested. It was generally agreed that I had no chance.

“ The Third Form prize,” read out the head, “ goes to Bell, who has—”

He got no further. To my utter amazement, such a pandemonium arose as I have never heard since. They yelled, and stamped, and hammered their fists on the tables. Over and over again the head appealed for order, but nothing could stem the excitement. It was simply another instance of the English boy’s passion for fair play.

At last the head was able to read out the marks. It appeared that I had notched something over four thousand, the runner-up being nearly a thousand away. I have never known in all my life such a moment as when I walked up the room to receive that prize—an extremely dull book called, “ The Life of General Grant.” But I didn’t care what it was called or what it was about. I never read it, but I treasured it beyond all treasures, and I treasure it still.

I won a good many prizes at my next school—sump-

tuous books bound in full calf and covered with gilt lettering. But they brought with them no such thrill as that cheap little book bound in red cloth.

After all, I must have had my "average." I wonder if the old lady, to whom I doubtless confided my troubles, had anything to do with it?

CHAPTER IV

MY FORTUNES BEGIN TO MEND

I HAVE, I fancy, recorded the significant fact that I was ear-marked—if one may use an expression usually reserved for pigs—for the service of the Church of England. Almost from the moment of my birth, so far as I can gather, it was decided that I should follow in the footsteps of my father and become a clergyman.

With this end in view it was that I took a class in the Sunday School at the age of seven. My pupils were about the same age as myself. We had a cosy corner of the big schoolroom, and it was remarked more than once that my class was the quietest, best-behaved, and most attentive class in the school. The mystery was explained when somebody discovered that I read to them, for a whole hour, from *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, and *The Boy's Own Paper*. Still, it was not as gay as it sounds, for the little dears did smell most horribly of hair-oil, and they would get so close to me that I could hardly breathe.

For many years, both as boy and youth, I sang in the choir. To this day I can sing from memory the bass-parts of all the well-known Ancient and Modern hymns, and the favourite chants and services. Indeed, I had no rest on Sundays when at home, for I read the lessons as well, and occasionally helped the ringers

before the service began. I once had the impertinence to tell my father that I worked harder on a Sunday than he did.

My father was in great request, I have mentioned, as a preacher at neighbouring churches, and I often went with him and read the lessons. This gave me valuable experience in adapting myself to the acoustics of all sorts of buildings, and stood me in good stead when I came to act at the London Coliseum and other large halls.

I will now reveal, for the benefit of any reader who has to speak in public, and is not too famous or too proud to take the hint, the secret of making yourself heard, without effort, in any type of building. It is extremely simple, and was given to me by an old clergyman.

“Before you begin to read the lesson,” he said, “always look down the church to the furthest point, and *measure the distance with your eye*. You will then instinctively so pitch your voice that you will be heard by the person furthest away.”

I did this invariably, with the result I have been rash enough to place on record. I hope my little secret may be of use to any other author—I would not, of course, dare to give any kind of a hint to young actors, who already know all there is to be known on all subjects on the stage or off it—who may be suddenly called upon to play in his own sketches or plays.

We will now return to the age of twelve. It was felt that my education was not yet complete; yet how was it to be continued? I know that I stayed at home for a considerable period, enjoying myself enormously, and doubtless learning far more that I should have learnt

at any school. But that was not considered sufficient for a future parson.

My eldest brother, the late Warren Bell, had just left St. John's School, Leatherhead, and was about to begin earning his living by imparting to others the knowledge he had himself so recently acquired. In the midst of our predicament, he happened to remember that the second master of Leatherhead, the Rev. W. Pace Rigg, M.A., had recently been appointed to the headmastership of King Alfred's School, Wantage, and that he was inviting old Leatherhead boys, or the brothers of Leatherhead boys, to go to him on favoured terms. So my brother coolly wrote a note to Rigg, never expecting to hear any more about the matter.

He was standing one day in the window of the dining-room at the vicarage—now the old vicarage—gazing idly down the street, and wondering how best to get through the afternoon, when suddenly he sprang back as though stung by a scorpion.

“What's the matter?” we asked.

“Rigg!” he faltered. “Rigg! Coming up the street!”

I dashed to the window and beheld a tall, powerfully-built man, very handsome, with wavy moustache and rubicund face, in the garb of a clergyman. My brother's alarm was lovely to behold. Although Rigg had no longer any jurisdiction over him, the old feeling of master and pupil was as strong as ever.

Rigg had come all the way from Wantage—an exceedingly awkward and tiring journey—on purpose to have a look at me. Of course, I did not know that at the time, but I learnt it later. He wanted to get hold

of boys who would, in his opinion, be something of a credit to the school, and he particularly wanted to find a boy who could proceed to Oxford from Wantage with the aid of an annual grant, this grant to come direct out of Rigg's own pocket.

Apparently he made up his mind that afternoon that I was this boy. My brother and I walked back with him to the station, four miles distant, in the grilling heat, and all the way he kept removing his wideawake, mopping his forehead, and exclaiming : " You must come to us ! You must come to us !"

He offered my parents such easy terms that they were glad to accept, and then there was the added chance of the scholarship. But here, he explained, there was a snag. (Rigg was the honestest man ever born into a dishonest world). The scholarship—a matter of £40 a year for three years—was to go to the first boy to pass " Smalls," and at least one other boy, older than myself, was in the running for it. Two boys could not hold it at once, so if this boy won it at the age, say, of eighteen, when I should be sixteen, I should have to wait till I was nineteen before my turn came round—seven years in all, an appallingly long time.

" But *he* won't win it !" declared Rigg, waving his damp handkerchief at the cows in the meadows. " He won't ! He'll never get through !"

All the same, Rigg coached this boy—who was a fine fellow and a great pal of mine—to the utmost of his ability, and the boy did get through; and proceeded to Keble College, where he distinguished himself—as he had at Wantage—as an athlete. I remember one year when he took at Wantage every prize open to him

in the athletic sports. I should imagine that his record for throwing the cricket-ball is still unbroken at the school. (His name was Fownes).

An incident that stands out in my memory is connected with Fownes. He said to me one day, "Come on, young Bell! I'm going to give you some practice in catching."

He picked up a cricket-ball and we went across to the field. Here, for about half-an-hour, he shied the ball at me with great force from a distance of about twenty yards, and I had to catch it. After the first five minutes I was catching nearly everything he liked to throw, and I was a good catch from that day forward. But this was the only instruction in cricket I ever had, which rather contradicts a remark made by Lord Harris when attending the lunch given to the Australians. I heard the speeches over the wireless.

"Cricket," said his lordship, "is the most democratic of all games. Every boy has the chance to become a great cricketer, no matter if he be rich or poor or whatever his station in life."

His lordship, I am afraid, was forgetting the all-important matter of early training. Hobbs and Tate, it is true, never went to one of our great public-schools, but both were the sons of professional cricketers, and must have had the best possible coaching from the time they could toddle.

Although I had to leave Wantage before I was old enough to try for the scholarship, during those four years I began to perceive that my fortunes were on the mend. Not, by any means, from a financial aspect; years were to elapse before the bogey of poverty withdrew his grinning face from my path. But, as I

grew older, I discovered a few likely assets within myself.

I discovered, for example, that I could, to some extent, act. There was never any chance of my being omitted from the cast when the annual theatricals came round. I remember once this faculty coming to my aid at a very present time of trouble.

The sports and theatricals both came at the end of the Easter term. I was desperately anxious to win the mile race for boys under fifteen, and to that end I used to get up at six o'clock every morning and do two miles round the cinder-path before morning prep., which began at seven. Not a bad job before breakfast for a growing lad of fourteen—two miles and then an hour's work on an empty stomach.

I usually had to train alone, but was sometimes accompanied by a boy named Law, whom I could beat with ease. Indeed, I may say that I was a pretty useful runner, and was often selected to pair off with a master or one of the senior boys as hare in the paper-chases.

I was scratch in this race, and the number of entries was staggering. As I stood at the scratch mark, and looked at the field ahead of me, the candidates seemed to stretch halfway round the track.

We had a German master in the school at that time. He may have been a good teacher of languages, but he knew nothing whatever about running. At the start of the race he rushed along at my side, very excited, and kept on shouting out, "Pass dem, Pell ! Pass all de poys ! Run fast down 'ill !"

Idiotic advice, of course, and absolutely opposed to all my methods in practice. But I was only fourteen, and he was a grown man, so I took his advice and

passed the lot. This was simple enough, but when I had done a couple of rounds I perceived, to my horror, that I was done for! I had spent myself too early in the race. Law came jogging past and won with the greatest ease, for I never finished at all.

Very crestfallen, I was leaving the course when Rigg came up, smiling and full of vigour.

“Well, Bell!” he said. “Some achieve fame on the field—others on the stage! Your chance will come to-morrow night!” It was just the word I wanted. With a smile that I hoped was easy and unforced, I watched Law walk off with the alarm-clock that I would have given half my life to win.

But Rigg was right. I got my little meed of success the following night. The play that year was the well-known comedietta, “Cut off with a Shilling,” and I was cast for the heroine. If I remember rightly, this young party does not leave the stage from curtain-rise to curtain-fall—a star part, if you like.

A few minutes before I was due to go on I happened to go into the matron’s room. I was dressed in a summer frock, and wore a hat to conceal my short hair. Whilst I was there the head’s wife entered. She looked at me for a moment, and then cried, in a tone of horror, “He can’t appear like that! Get some newspapers, Matron! Be quick! You do one side and I’ll do the other!” And they proceeded to give me a “bust” suitable for the part.

They must have done their work well, for the local reporter was quite deceived. “Miss J. K. Bell,” he wrote, “acquitted herself charmingly in the only female part.”

That was my first and last appearance as a female

impersonator. Despite my success, I did not much care for it, but it was better than my very first public appearance on the stage, which took place when I was nine. Before that time I had constantly acted in the privacy of the home, and once put through a one-man show, lasting the entire remorseless evening. This was after seeing the great McCabe, who came to our village. (His brother was a Roman Catholic priest and laboured piously in the adjoining village).

At the age of nine I played in public with one of my sisters, and a very handsome girl who normally took charge of the local post-office. She appeared in trousers ; my sister was the heroine ; and I was the oldest inhabitant. I forgot the name of the piece, but we did it at intervals of an hour all the afternoon and evening. It was one of those tiresome old plays on which amateurs are not expected to pay a fee.

Naturally, there was considerable difficulty about my make-up. We had no wigs or grease-paints, and could not afford to hire them. So we borrowed a helmet from an old soldier in the village, and I put this on my head, being thus completely obscured. A quavering treble voice from inside the helmet did the rest. The room was packed at each performance and I was strengthened in my intention to become an actor should the Church fail me as a profession.

My glory as an actor at Wantage was rather dimmed the following term by the fact that, for the first and, I hope, the last time in my life, I was birched. And yet, you know, I was only fighting for the common weal. It was in this way.

The headmaster had a very lovely garden, and this garden was well-stocked with luscious fruits, such as

gooseberries, currants, raspberries, and green peas in their pods. It had been his custom, on the last Sunday of the summer term, to invite the boys—the boarders, that is—into the garden and to let them help themselves.

I had looked forward to this event with great ardour, but, to our horror, it never came. Either he or his good lady had thought better of it—nor do I blame them for that. I blamed them at the time, however, and my blood boiled. The blood of two other heroes also boiled—one a friend named Radcliffe, and the other the same Law who had wrested from me the prize for the mile-race (under fifteen).

We determined to invite ourselves into this lovely garden. The way in was quite easy. You simply climbed round some railings at the end of the play-ground and you were already on forbidden territory. Thence you made your way round the back of the big school to the private garden.

We selected Sunday afternoon for the job. The plot was common knowledge, and many there were who promised faithfully to wait by the railings and receive the stolen goods. And this they did, for the first raid was quite successful. We filled their eager hands with currants and gooseberries and green peas in their pods.

The second raid was equally successful. The crowd on the safe side of the railings had grown to rather startling proportions. For the moment, we were indeed heroes. The deeds of the Three Musketeers paled into nothingness as compared with our spoliation of Eden.

Over-confidence was the cause of our downfall.

We went a third time, and were hard at it when a very well-known footstep came to our ears.

“Pacey!” whispered one of the conspirators.
(That was our name for the Rev. W. Pace Rigg.)

“Let’s bolt for it!”

But I could not do that. After all, the head and I were considerable friends. We understood one another, as the song says. He often cracked jokes for my especial benefit. I could not let him see me running away like a street-urchin.

So we stood our ground. Rigg came along like a ship in full sail. He threw out one hand with a dramatic gesture, indicating that we should go the way we had come. Hardly a word was spoken. We went.

That was a Sunday, and the next morning the examinations began—the annual examinations, with a don from Oxford to examine us, clean blotting-paper, white foolscap, new nibs, and all the rest of it. The first paper on Monday morning would be Divinity, and I was favourite for the Fifth Form prize.

Opinion in the school was divided as to our fate. Some thought we should be let off altogether on account of the examinations. Others put it down as worth a birching, and a few optimists decided that we should be expelled. I myself thought we should get off with a lecture.

Birchings and canings, which were not frequent at Wantage, were always announced in full school after morning prayers. Instead of the customary orders “Go to your classrooms,” there would be an ominous pause, and then Rigg, nervously moving the ink-pot and everything on his desk that was movable, would deliver a short harangue, finally naming the culprit,

and directing him to go to the masters' common room. The culprit would slink out, followed by the head and an assistant-master. The rest of us would sit silently in our places until the ordeal was over. And when next we met the victim, the first question was, "How many?"

On this important morning we had the harangue, but it was all about the examinations. Paper was served out, the questions were handed to us, and I, immensely relieved, began to write hard for the prize which I felt was mine for the writing.

And then a sinister thing happened. We had been at work for about half-an-hour when one of the masters went up to Radcliffe—the eldest of the trio—and touched him on the shoulder. Radcliffe rose, gave me a sickly grin, and went down the long room.

I went on writing. I told myself that this had nothing to do with the regrettable incident in the garden. Probably his father had called, or—or something of that sort. Surely, nobody would be so callous, so devoid of all sense of decency and fair play, as to flog an earnest student in the midst of his Divinity paper.

Radcliffe did not return. Presently the same master touched *me* on the shoulder.

"Mr. Rigg wishes to see you in the common room."

Even now I refused to believe the worst. He was going to reason with me and demand an apology. Well, he should have his apology. After all, the man's garden was his own. If he wanted all the fruit and green peas for himself, let him have them.

I entered the common room. There was no sign of Radcliffe. Rigg, arrayed in his gown, and a junior

master named Newman, also arrayed in a gown (to which he had no academic right), were in the room, looking, I thought, rather sheepish. The table had been moved away from the centre of the room, and in its place stood a chair—the chair of execution.

Newman began to fiddle with things on the mantelpiece, but a blind cat would have seen how he hated it all. He was a good chap, and I felt sorry for him. As for Rigg, he gave me some hurried instructions as to what clothing it would be necessary to remove.

For my part, I called on all my powers as an actor. It is difficult, heaven knows, to preserve one's dignity as an English gentleman when bending over a chair for the purpose of being birched, but I was determined to do it so far as was humanly possible. I would not, of course, struggle, nor would I emit a single sound.

Ten strokes was my portion. They took away my breath, for a birch on the bare flesh is very painful, but I remained silent. The moment the operation was over, Rigg popped the birch on to a high shelf, and actually apologised for what he had done! He said he didn't know if "my people" would approve of it, and had he known that I desired fruit I could have had any quantity at his disposal.

Still silent, I dressed myself and walked out of the room. I was not cross with him, but I felt that he needed a lesson.

Pausing outside the door of the big schoolroom, I twisted my features into what I hoped was a careless grin, and so made my way back to my place. But the virtue had gone out of me. I could not write. I had no further interest in Divinity, and instead of winning that prize I came out fourth.

So much for the asset of histrionics. A term or two later I made another discovery, to have an important bearing on my future career, and this was that I possessed a certain facility with the pen.

A very clever young master came to us from Cambridge. We were told he had been Senior Classic, but I always doubted that. Anyway, he had ideas of his own, and set our form to writing essays. Moreover, he allowed us to choose the subjects.

Most of the boys hated this essay-writing, but I revelled in it because I could do it so quickly. We would be allowed, say, an hour during evening prep for our essay. I could get mine done in fifteen minutes at the outside, and that left me forty-five minutes for Walter Scott, whom I was stolidly reading through from the first volume to the last. (I have never read this great author since, and I doubt if I ever shall. But I achieved the task.)

My failure at cricket I atoned for in a rather strange manner. One day I found that somebody had introduced into the playground—a large, asphalted space—a genuine velocipede. I had never seen such a thing except in pictures. It had two wooden wheels of equal size, shod with iron tyres. There was a very short handle-bar, giving small control, and no brake of any kind.

How it got there I never knew, but the boys were a standing round it like cows sniffing at a dog. Nobody could ride it, or even volunteered to try. So I got into the little wooden saddle and rode the clumsy thing round and round the playground.

They thought the feat magical, but the fact was I had always been nippy on a bicycle, and had ridden

various machines—of the high variety—belonging to other boys. Before many days were over, I had taught every boy in the school to ride this velocipede, and one of the masters as well. I even used to ride into the town on it—in fact, I would do anything on it that I was dared to do. I rode it all round the big schoolroom and down the steps into the playground. They put a form up in the middle of the playground. I rode at it, knocked it over, and rode over it without coming off.

But, naturally, I went too far. There were four steepish steps leading from the playground to the main road, and on the other side of the road was the home of the Wantage fire-engine. Somebody dared me to ride down these steps into the road. I did so, but could not stop the vehicle when I got to the road, and so charged smack into the fire-engine house. After that the velocipede disappeared.

You will have gathered that we had a pretty good time of it at Wantage. I am afraid we had far too good a time. Rigg was a better friend, in a social sense, than a disciplinarian. He would have tremendous bursts of discipline, which took everybody, masters and boys, by surprise, and made them look very foolish. One such trick was to come into the big school on the very stroke of nine and lock the doors. I have known all the masters to be locked out in that way. When the door was opened, and they came streaming in, Rigg would receive them with uplifted brows and the most charming smile in the world.

I left Wantage when I was sixteen, and carried off an armful of prizes. How I got them I know not, for I was much too busy with theatricals and other distractions to do any real work. One was for Divinity,

making up for the prize I had lost owing to the fruit incident. Another was for French, and a third for Greek.

For the rest, I had been confirmed (in a pair of lady's long gloves, as already narrated), and I had made the acquaintance of a very fine English gentleman. And I had learnt to play the piccolo, whereby I became the leader of the school drum-and-fife band. Another distraction from work.

But I was not much nearer to being a clergyman of the Church of England—though there must be many bishops who could not ride a velocipede or play the piccolo.

How was the desired end to be attained ?

CHAPTER V

OXFORD AT LAST

AT the age of sixteen I began to assume control over my own fortunes. Glancing one day through a periodical—probably the *Church Times* or the *Guardian*—I came across an advertisement that at once chained my attention.

The advertiser was a gentleman in Holy Orders who had conceived a witty method in which young gentlemen of very slender means—a flattering way of describing my own financial condition—could obtain a degree at Oxford without belonging to any college or even living in Oxford! Here, if you like, was a startler, and I was duly startled into writing for further particulars.

The gentleman in Holy Orders replied fully and promptly. He explained that, according to the Statutes of the University, no undergraduate could sit for his degree unless he had kept twelve terms as a resident student. Residence, however, might be limited to *sleeping* in Oxford, at a properly authorised establishment, not less than forty-two nights in each term.

The gentleman in Holy Orders had consequently acquired an establishment outside the radius of the University, but within walking distance by any active young fellow. He had further arranged with the

principal of a certain private Hall to place at his disposal, for forty-two nights in each term, a certain number of bedrooms. No meals would be taken at the Hall. Students under this scheme would simply walk to their beds, sleep in them, and walk back to breakfast at the establishment outside the radius, which, I need hardly say, was run on extremely economical lines.

The terms quoted were so small that there seemed to be a ray of hope. The ray brightened into a golden gleam through the kindness of an aunt of my mother's, and away I went once more into the unknown.

Unknown indeed ! A stranger establishment I have never encountered. The head himself was a B.A. of London University, and I imagine that his knowledge of the classics was so slight as to be unworthy of recollection. At any rate, I never remember his coaching me or anybody else in any classical subject.

He had two assistants, both of whom were in the same plight as the pupils. That is to say, both these gentlemen had joined the staff before the allotment of their own degrees, and were hoping to teach us and pass the self-same examinations at one and the same time. Thus it came about that masters and pupils all worked together, entered for their examinations together, and passed or were ploughed together. If anybody can beat that in the history of eccentric education, I shall be glad to have a postcard from him on the subject.

As I was only sixteen, and eighteen seemed quite early enough to become an undergraduate, I had two years before me in which to prepare for and pass "Smalls." If I remember rightly, the subjects for

Smalls in those days were Latin and Greek grammar, Latin Prose and Latin Unseen, the "Hecuba" or "Alcestis" of Euripides, a Latin author, Euclid or Algebra, and arithmetic (the whole). If you failed in one subject, you failed in all, and the entire examination must be taken over again.

The stumbling-block in the case of most people was arithmetic (the whole). There was one gentleman very well known by sight in Oxford. He had a long white beard, bald head, white whiskers, and white moustache. By special order, he was allowed to wear his undergraduate's gown to his heels, so that his appearance was truly venerable.

This aged gentleman had come to Oxford many years previously with the set intent of taking his degree. But he could *not* get through Smalls, and arithmetic (the whole) was the trouble. Time went on, and he rented a house, married, and settled down in Oxford. Three times a year he presented himself for examination in Smalls, and three times a year he was steadily ploughed in arithmetic.

Children were born to him—sons who grew up, entered the University, took their degrees without effort, went out into the world, married in their turn, and made the old gentleman a grandfather. Still he could not pass Smalls, although he had all the other subjects at his fingers' ends. The examiners became personal friends of the aged candidate. They used to dine at his house and invite him to their own houses.

Can you imagine grown men being so idiotic? Can you imagine a farce such as this being played in the greatest university in the world for a generation and more? They knew he was fully qualified in all

other subjects, but arithmetic (the whole) had to be taken, and it was impossible, of course, to alter a rule once made.

In Jubilee Year—the 1897 Jubilee of Queen Victoria—they thought the farce had gone on long enough and let him through. The old gentleman immediately passed all his other examinations and took his degree. But he had been kept waiting for *twenty-five years* because he could not satisfy the examiners that he was conversant with all the rules of arithmetic.

This is a true story. Three times I myself was a candidate with the old boy in Smalls, and twice they also ploughed me in arithmetic. The third time I passed, as I had previously passed in all the other subjects.

In the meantime, of course, having nothing to learn but arithmetic, I had been turning my attention to more important matters, such as the stage and journalism. Once again I made a nice little hit, in a play called “Frank Fox Phipps, Esq.” and after that I produced and acted in a show outside the establishment, which was notable for the fact that my scenery was made to revolve, thus saving time and money in the changing of the scenes. This was doubtless an old trick, but I delved it out of my own intelligence.

I also obtained permission to found and edit a magazine to record the strange doings of the establishment. This magazine was at first written out in full, copies being subsequently struck off by means of gelatine. When we attained to the printing stage, an indignation meeting was held, at which I was not present. A notice was posted demanding that the magazine—which had a compulsory circulation—

should be “edited and written with knowledge and ability.” I signed the manifesto, and got my two assistants to do the same.

But the most important event of this period was the publication of an article from my pen, and under my signature, in the *Boy's Own Paper*. Never shall I forget the thrill of opening that envelope, addressed in a strange hand, and withdrawing from it *a printed proof of my article*, with my name set out at the top ! It meant that the flood-gates were lifted ! If I could do one, I told myself, I could do ten thousand ! At seventeen years of age, I was a made man ! Whatever the university authorities might do to me, whatever any one might do to me, they could not prevent my earning a living so long as I had anything like decent health.

Yes, for a few weeks I walked on air. I knew the meaning of that wonderful sensation. When the article was published, and my name appeared on the outer wrapper, I felt that the whole world must see it and be familiar with it.

Came a cheque for ten-and-sixpence. Not, perhaps, extravagant pay for a thousand word article, but the first pay I had ever received for a bit of work out of my own head. The cheque had to be cashed—very swiftly—but the envelope in which the proof had arrived was treasured by me for many years. What is more, I saw the same handwriting pretty frequently after that, and the cheques slowly increased in size.

At the age of eighteen I had passed Smalls and matriculated at Oxford. But not under the scheme of the gentleman in Holy Orders. I had found a better one than that. I became an unattached student, and

lived in rooms for three terms, during which period I passed Divinity Mods. and Mods. without any difficulty.

I then migrated to Worcester College, the idea being that I should read for honours in Theology. In the meantime, however, I had met—for a brief period—one of the world's celebrities. This was no less a person than Dr. Spooner, the Warden of New College, whose name will always be remembered so long as “Spoonerisms” are committed or invented.

Dr. Spooner was one of the examiners for Mods., and I had to face him across a table during the *viva voce* examination. I was very excited at the prospect because it was rumoured in the 'Varsity that this distinguished gentleman had pink eyes. Men used to go out of their way to meet him in the street in order to settle this point. I was now to have an unrivalled opportunity of settling it. Moreover, there was always just the chance that he might make a “Spoonerism.”

Needless, at this time of day, to define a Spoonerism. Here is one example, not quite so hackneyed as those usually repeated.

It was said that the doctor, who lived in college and rather high up, had some ladies to tea. It was summer-time, and the window was wide open. On the windowsill slept and purred a pretty little kitten.

“Oh, Dr. Spooner,” said one of the ladies, “aren't you afraid your dear little kitten may fall and get killed?”

“Not a bit,” replied the doctor. “In fact, she did fall the other day.”

“Oh, doctor!” cried all the horrified ladies. “Was she hurt?”

“ Not in the least. Simply popped on her draws and ran across the quad.”

“ Sit down,” said Dr. Spooner, and I sat down in the chair immediately facing him. I then looked him boldly in the eyes. Alas, they were *not* pink ! Another illusion shattered ! This rather upset me, so that I was not fully prepared for the next command.

“ You will find a Virgil there. Open it at Book V.”

“ I beg your pardon, sir ?” (How had this foolish rumour about pink eyes arisen ?)

“ A Virgil. Open it at Book V. Translate from line 347 onwards.”

This was a gift. I loved Virgil, and I have ventured to say something of my aptitude for translating foreign languages. To my surprise, the great man stopped me almost immediately with a testy expression.

“ No ! No ! No ! That won’t do ! Translate it word for word ! I want to see if you know which is which ! ”

Here, indeed, was an insult ! But I obeyed, laboriously and mechanically chanting first a word in Latin and then the equivalent in English. After a while, he stopped me again.

“ Yes,” he said. “ Now, why didn’t you translate like that in your paper ? Your Virgil paper was very bad, but your other papers were very good, so I think you’ll just pass.”

Imagine it ! I had been nearly ploughed for turning a Latin poet into would-be poetic English ! I doubt if there was another examinee in that room who could have given a more flowing translation of the poet than I did. Yet this was my sin, and might well have cost me the examination. Such is the Oxford system. Rule of thumb is what they want.

There was now nothing before me but my final exam., and I should not be allowed to sit for that for another two and a half years. At eighteen, two and a half years seems an eternity.

A course of study was mapped out for me, which included certain lectures. Once a week I had to write an essay and read it to my tutor, who would then dictate dull notes until the appointed hour was concluded. (He usually ate buttered muffins to make the time pass more pleasantly for himself. Nor do I blame him.) For the rest, I could do as I liked.

I now became, among other things, a dramatic critic. I was, of course, as I always have been, passionately devoted to the theatre, and here was my chance to see all the plays that came to Oxford for nothing. I began by writing criticisms for the *Oxford Magazine*, and transferred my services from that august journal to the little pink evening paper published in term-time called the *Oxford Review*.

I also wrote verses for the *Isis*. But my greatest success of the moment came about in an unexpected way, as success usually does come. At the theatre one night a comedian called (I think) H. C. Barry was singing a comic song entitled, "Jack's as good as his master." The song was encored, and he repeated the final verse. This seemed tame, so I sat down and wrote an extra verse with a topical flavour, and left it at the theatre next day for Mr. Barry. In the evening I called at the stage-door, and sent in to ask Mr. Barry if he was going to sing my verse. He sent out to say he was, but there was no suggestion that I should accept a seat to hear it. So I had to pay for the pit.

He sang all his other verses, and then came mine.

The triumph of this jejune effort was amazing. The audience of undergrads., who had no idea whence the verse came, chose to go mad about it. They made Barry sing it five or six times each night, and it was yelled in every street and in every college room. It was the first time anything of mine had been given from a public stage, and I was quite unduly elated. The comedian, however, never sent me even a line of thanks.

Being in urgent need of money, I was also writing for certain London papers, and my articles appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Tit-Bits*, and so forth. The payment was not great, but very, very acceptable.

My official life at Worcester College was not a huge success. The provost was Dr. Inge, father of Dean Inge. I attended one of his Sunday evening receptions for first-year men, but my visit seemed to bore him slightly, and my pride would not brook that. So I stayed away. I met the provost on another occasion when he informed me that my tutor was not at all pleased with me. I replied that I was not at all pleased with my tutor, and we parted on rather chilly terms.

The bursar was one Jackson, who afterwards became provost. I cannot remember that we ever exchanged a single word. All my lectures were outside the college, for I was the only candidate for the honour theological school, of whom there were no more than forty in the whole 'Varsity.

The dean was W. H. Hadow, now Sir William Hadow. I met him once. He sent for me to ask why I had not attended chapel on Sunday. I replied that I was at Pembroke at the time, and the distance was too great to cover. He told me not to visit Pembroke any more—or words to that effect.

My moral tutor was one Gerrans, who had the reputation of being a very cynical and terrible man. I don't know about that, for we never met during the whole of my time at Worcester.

I went in for rowing. Each day after lunch, which consisted of bread-and-butter and cold water, I changed into rowing shorts and vest and went down to the college barge. Here I was duly "tubbed," and finally rowed in the Torpid Fours. To my huge delight, we won our race, and I foresaw fame as an oarsman. Three nights later I found my name omitted from the list of those wanted at the barge for practice. The reason was never given me, and I do not know it to this day. But I thought the procedure very arbitrary.

The college was divided into two parts, both architecturally and socially. On one side you had the provost's house and some imposing rooms occupied by the more wealthy men—mostly commoners. On the other side you had some very charming and picturesque old buildings known as the "cottages." Here resided the scholars and exhibitioners and poorer men. I need hardly say that all my friends—and I had some very charming friends—lived in the cottages.

The Cottages looked out over the gardens, and I have always thought the Worcester College gardens easily the most beautiful in Oxford. The original place is very ancient; the most ancient building, I believe, in all the 'Varsity, and formerly a monastery.

The chief feature of the gardens is the lake, and one evening a member of the college was thrown into this lake for having incurred the displeasure of the senior men by his conduct in and out of the college. He

took his name off the books but reappeared with a horsewhip. Nobody was horsewhipped.

Once a year, Mr. Ben Greet used to arrive with his company of pastoral players and give performances in the gardens. His voice was so carrying that one could sit in the cottages and hear every word he spoke. The rest of the company were not so audible.

One of my friends actually *knew* Ben Greet, and I was honoured by an invitation to meet the great actor at tea. My friend impressed upon me and his other guests that we were not to speak unless addressed, and should generally comport ourselves as though in the presence of royalty.

I was very thrilled. I took care to arrive in good time, but tea was delayed until the chief guest appeared on the scene. It so happened that he was very late, and only stayed a few minutes. We all rose to our feet when he entered the room, and remained standing until gracious permission was given by the host to sit. It was the first time, of course, that I had been in the same room as a famous actor. I never forgot it.

We had, naturally, heroes of our own. The chief heroes of my day, all senior to me, were C. B. Fry, of Wadham; J. A. Simon, of Wadham; F. E. Smith, of Wadham; Hilaire Belloc, of Balliol; Paul Rubens (Univ.); James Hearn (B.N.C.); and the brothers Palairé, the cricketers.

Fry—with whom I was to come in contact later, as you shall hear, and on whose destinies I may claim to have had some slight influence—was easily the greatest celebrity of all. He could do everything—except act. He was the champion long jumper of the world, having cleared no less than twenty-three feet

five inches. He was also captain of the 'Varsity Soccer, and captain of the 'Varsity cricket. That made him a triple blue. He was down to play in the Rugger team against Cambridge, which would have made him a quadruple blue, but illness intervened and spoilt another record. Still, he had not done badly. He once appeared with the O.U.D.S. The play was "The Merchant of Venice," and Fry played the Prince of Morocco, who tries his luck with the caskets. When he chose the wrong casket, and cried "Oh, Hell!" the 'Varsity rocked with joy. The O.U.D.S. benefited by this very bad performance of Fry's, for all the town turned out to hear him give vent to that sincere imprecation.

Fry was not a shy man. No. He let the people see him on the right occasions and in the right way. I remember him very well as a skater. It was the year the Thames froze so hard that people roasted oxen on it, and drove coaches across it, and that sort of thing.

We all skated on the Cherwell, which bore at the side but was not safe in the middle. Fry went in for pace. He formed a party of skaters, and they swept along in single file as fast as they could manage. The cry would go up, "Look out! Fry's coming!" and everybody climbed on to the banks. Then the column would sweep by, Fry leading, at forty to fifty miles an hour. It was an imposing business, and Fry looked as though he was enjoying it very much.

F. E. Smith (now the Earl of Birkenhead) had taken his degree when I went up, and was eating his dinners in London. In appearance he was very much the same then as he is now. I saw him chiefly at the Union. His habit was to come straight from the station to the

Union, bringing with him the atmosphere of London and great things that really mattered. A few years make a tremendous difference at that age, and a man of twenty-four or twenty-five was an uncrowned king in any undergraduate assembly.

As an ex-president of the Union, “F. E.” would be called on at once, and he would open, in his assured manner, rather like this :

“I was not privileged, Mr. President, to hear the opening speeches of this debate, but I imagine that the mover of the motion advanced some such arguments as these. He probably told you . . .” And then would follow a synopsis of the first speech. “The opposer, in his reply, doubtless informed you . . .” Another synopsis, and so on through all the four opening speeches. “I shall now make so bold, Mr. President, as to tell the house that these gentlemen know nothing whatever about the subject under discussion.” (Loud laughter, and “F. E.” was well into his stride.)

It was during the time that he was a Junior Fellow at Merton that the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, paid a visit to Oxford to open the new Town Hall. There were rumours of a Town and Gown row in the evening, and Metropolitan Police, some mounted, were drafted into the city.

On the morning of the Royal visit, “F. E.” warned his class to stay in their rooms if they wished to avoid trouble. “The police,” he said, “are very determined to suppress any attempt at a rag.”

Of course, nobody did stay in his rooms. Not likely, with fireworks going off, and the whole place decorated and illuminated, and cries of “’Varsity!” coming from every quarter.

In the midst of the Babel in the High, which waxed so fierce that the police were riding on the pavement, and a respectable doctor who had slipped out to post a letter was hit over the head with a truncheon, in the midst of all this, I say, F. E. Smith saw his own scout being hauled off to the cells. This was too much for him, and he dashed to the rescue. The police, being no respecters of dons at this juncture, hauled *him* off as well. But "F. E." kept his wits about him, and called to some men at an upper window to witness that he was not offering resistance to the police.

Next morning he was brought before the magistrates and conducted his own defence. The police said he was a "desprit willun," and had kicked them on the shins, to say nothing of biting and scratching. "F. E." produced his witnesses, and was acquitted without a blot on his escutcheon. I heard that, on going into Hall at Merton that night, he was received by the entire college, high table and all, standing.

He, also, was never a shy man.

I remember J. A. Simon (now Sir John Simon, K.C.), first as junior treasurer of the Union, and then as president. He was a young man who clearly intended to get on in the world. He treated life even then as a game of chess, and never made a false move. His imperturbable manner, combined with a dry humour, was the very thing for the Union, especially at question time.

We had a man at Worcester named Bruce, who was famous for his flashes of wit in the Union. I think they were carefully prepared, and rehearsed with a confederate, but I may be wrong, and they were effective for all that.

On one occasion Simon had to announce, as junior treasurer, that kennels would be provided in the grounds of the Union in order that members might leave their dogs in safety and comfort.

A member rose and expressed his gratitude. "That, sir," he said, "will be A1."

Bruce immediately leapt to his feet. "Would it not be more correct to describe it, sir, as K9?"

This quip went round the 'Varsity and was repeated for many terms afterwards. It was not difficult, you see, to obtain fame in that tiny world.

Another man prominent at the Union in those days was Hilaire Belloc, brother of my old friend, Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes. Belloc always had an impassioned, perfervid manner, and a torrent of words. About a year ago I heard him speak at the Dome, Brighton, on the question of the future of the Aquarium. Why he should have bothered about the Aquarium I cannot imagine—probably to oblige Mr. Harry Preston, who was also on the platform—but there he was. The crowd interrupted all the speakers, even Belloc, and he was moved to much wrath.

"By the living God," he cried, beating the air with his fist, "but you can't shout *me* down!"

They did, all the same. It was very like the old days at the Union.

Paul Reubens was a gentle, rather sad-looking youth from Univ. He played the piano delightfully, and used to go to smokers with James Hearn—then the *lion comique* of the 'Varsity, and very fat; later a thin, serious actor with Forbes Robertson—and play his accompaniments. If an extra turn was wanted, Rubens used to sing "The Tin Gee-Gee," and play for him-

self. His voice was not pleasing, but he knew how to get the song over, and his touch on the piano was exquisite.

And now both those men, still young, have passed away.

To add to my diversions, I became a soldier of the Queen. That is to say, I was enrolled as a private in the Oxford University Volunteer Rifle Corps, afterwards known as the O.T.C., and boasting the Prince of Wales as one of its officers. In my day, however, it was not at all fashionable to belong to the O.U.V.R. It was fashionable at Cambridge, where they had six hundred members and Gatling-guns, but not at Oxford, where we could only muster two hundred all told out of three thousand. The reason lay in the uniform. Cambridge had a fancy light grey uniform of their own design and selection; we wore the ordinary red tunic and blue trousers of the Oxford Light Infantry.

I didn't care a button whether it was fashionable or not. I was told (*a*) it was my duty to join and (*b*) I should have a good time. So I joined, and ultimately rose to the rank of sergeant. I also scraped into the first class for shooting, and won three prizes for physical drill.

The latter triumph was rather amusing. The physical drill competition was held each year in camp. A certain company, to which I was at first attached, had won it year after year, and I was in the winning squad for two years. When the third year came round, I was in another company, and this company had never even competed in the physical drill contest. None of the men knew anything about it, and the officer

confessed that he did not know the words of command.

“ All the same,” I said, with the authority of a sergeant, “ we must go in for it and we must win it.”

I got my squad together and drilled them in secret. They were quite keen. I taught the officer the words of command, and made him rehearse with us the woods and shrubberies. I constituted myself right-hand man, to whom fell the task of setting the time.

We won it with full marks, much to the fury of my old company. They said I had learnt it all from them, and had no business to hand the knowledge on to others. I replied that the service of Her Majesty the Queen came first, and we pocketed seven shillings apiece prize-money.

We had a very ambitious adjutant, who was a Regular. (Incidentally, he had a lovely young wife, whom we all adored—from a distance). The adjutant arranged a field-day with Cambridge. We were to proceed to Cambridge, detraining some miles from the town. We were to be assisted by the cadet corps from Bedford College, and Cambridge were to have the help—if they needed it—of the Bedfordshire Yeomanry, or some other equally gallant body of men.

I think about eighty of us paraded, one of whom had to be sent back to college as improperly dressed for the fray. He was wearing patent-leather boots with his uniform, and had put on his helmet, neatly enough, the wrong way round.

We detrained at the appointed spot, and began to march. It was a wintry day, and we expected to meet Cambridge soon after lunch. We should then have a

battle, annihilate them, march into Cambridge, take a good tea, and return to Oxford.

We marched, and we marched, and we marched. It was what is called, in military circles, a *detour*. The Bedford boys were holding Cambridge in check until we arrived.

We marched, and we marched, and we marched. We were getting tired. The light began to fail. Was it possible—could it be possible—that we were *lost*? My rifle, normal weight about fifteen pounds, was now one ton.

We marched, and we marched, and we marched. A cyclist scout arrived on the scene. From him it was learned that the Bedford boys had been blown to bits and had returned to Bedford. The Yeomanry had not come into action.

We marched on. The light was fast failing. The blank ammunition was burning holes in our wallets.

Then the adjutant took pity on our plight. Dividing us into two parties, he bade us fire at each other until all were destroyed. This we accordingly did, subsequently marching into Cambridge with songs of victory on our lips. The only thing that happened according to plan was the tea.

Yet another ambitious attempt was a night-attack. This took place in camp, the camping-ground being the colonel's park, near Oxford. The scheme was simple. Blank ammunition was served out to the cyclists, who were instructed to get up about two in the morning and attack the camp from outside. It was a deadly secret.

At the darkest hour of night, accordingly, the whole countryside was startled by rifle-shots. The camp was

roused, we dressed, fell in, and received our ammunition. It was a desperate moment.

On came the cyclists, each man representing twenty. We lay down and fired at them. The noise was deafening.

Suddenly, above the crack of the rifles, was heard a deep and angry voice, shouting, "What's all this damned nonsense?"

It was the colonel, roused from his slumbers in his house near at hand. He sent us all back to our beds like naughty schoolboys.

That was all very well, but what of England in her need? That was the question we put to ourselves next day. Some said England would never need the O.U.V.R. But she did. Not so many years later came the Boer War, and then the Volunteers became, at last, the fashion. Even the Blues rushed to take up arms, and the corps was no longer laughed at by gilded youths lolling in expensive windows as the O.U.V.R. marched down the High. But the recruits were too late. It was the veterans who went to Africa.

They were splendid days, those days in camp! But all the days were splendid just then. I had no money, it is true, but that did not matter very much. One did not require cash. You got what you wanted from the obliging tradespeople, and you hoped to pay them back when Fortune, in the distant future, smiled on you. That was the system—but it took years to pay them back.

We spent long afternoons in Canadian canoes on the "Char." We made up scratch fours and rowed miles and miles up the river. We drank quantities of cider. We formed ourselves into small literary clubs, and

read the plays of Shakespeare aloud, and drank coffee, and smoked cigarettes, and finished up by hurling ourselves and other people about.

We went to the theatre and demanded encores until the folk on the stage could give no more. We worshipped famous actors and idolized lovely actresses. Every man who was a man had a cabinet photograph of Mabel Love in his rooms. Some had May Yohe as well. I remember a verse, not written by me, which ran :

There's a Trinity man whom I know. He
Had photographs all in a row. He
Had one of Mamma,
And one of Papa,
And about twenty-five of May Yohe.

Unfortunately, it appeared in the *Granta* and not in the *Isis*, but we were generous enough to laugh at it. Oxford preferred Mabel Love to May Yohe. When she came to the New Theatre with Little Tich, the 'Varsity went quite mad. A man at the House was said actually to know her, but we could scarcely credit such perfect bliss as that. I know she looked at me when I stood applauding in the stalls, and I rushed along to the offices of the *Oxford Review* and gave her a notice that might easily have turned the head of Sarah Bernhardt.

Happy days!—suddenly cut short by a letter from my father. He said that the money put up by my mother's aunt was exhausted, and I must now take a mastership and read in my spare time, returning to Oxford to keep my final terms—the summer term counting as two—and sit for the exam.

Yes, but I had been reserving that last year for the real work ! He did not know that, but I did. How could I do it without help ? Without books ? Without guidance ? And teach others into the bargain ?

Still, there was the situation. A man I knew at John's had a father who kept a school at Manchester. He said it would be great fun if I came along as one of the staff at a nominal salary. So I went. It was *not* great fun. But I did help to produce the boys in "Julius Cæsar," and thereby made the acquaintance of the late Louis Calvert. Years after I accused him, chaffingly, of cribbing my "business."

CHAPTER VI

A LEAP INTO THE WORLD

I DO not propose to give a detailed account in this book of my experiences as a schoolmaster, and for two reasons. The first is that the whole affair was a side-issue, leading to nothing, and constituting, therefore, a sort of backwater with which this straightforward story of struggle and endeavour has nothing to do. The second reason is that I made use of that matter to form the basis of a work of fiction. Should any reader be sufficiently curious to discover to which of my novels I am alluding, I must ask him to bear in mind that it *is* a novel, and that the incidents and people therein depicted are to be regarded as purely fictitious.

I have often been asked why I adopted a pseudonym, and why "Keble Howard." As this came about just as my school-mastering days were drawing to a close, I may as well explain the small matter in the present place.

My eldest brother, the late R. S. Warren Bell, to whom I have already alluded more than once, had been invited by the firm of George Newnes, Limited, to found and edit a magazine for boys. This magazine eventually came into being under the title of *The Captain*, and my brother, who wrote several excellent serial stories for it, asked me to help him with articles, stories, and suggestions.

“But,” said he, “we can’t have it too much of a family affair, so you must think out another name.”

My own name is John Keble Bell, my father having called me John Keble after the author of “The Christian Year,” who was a neighbouring priest and a man held in the highest esteem by all Churchmen.

I wanted to retain the name “Keble,” which was distinctive, but has since given rise to any amount of trouble. You would not conceive it possible that one name could be the cause of so many mistakes, both in pronunciation and in spelling. The usual mistake in pronunciation is to call it “Kebble,” and I have many excellent friends who call me “Kebble” to this day. As for spelling, the most common mistake is “Keeble,” but I am also addressed as “Keable” and “Keabel.” One club to which I belong invariably prints my name in the list of members as “Howard Keble.” I have made mild protests, but what does it matter?

Anyway, there was the first name decided upon. I had two family names from which to choose my second name—Howard and Warren. My father’s maternal ancestors were Howards, and my mother’s maiden name was Warren. The latter had been bestowed upon my brother, so, rather reluctantly, I took the name Howard, tacked it on to my Keble, and Keble Howard I have been to the public ever since.

But I wrote for the *Captain* under various pseudonyms, usually made up on the spot by my brother. “John Methuen” was one of them, and the others I have forgotten. Many of my articles were unsigned, including the “Reviews of School Magazines,” which I did every month for quite a long time—and very difficult I found it to say something fresh and different

about each magazine. The feature was my own idea, and proved extremely popular with the readers of the magazine.

My brother was very anxious to secure some feature which would give a special lift to the magazine from the first number. I therefore suggested to him that he should try to get C. B. Fry, my Oxford idol, or one of them, to write an article each month about athletics and training, and also to answer letters sent to him by boys, who would be immensely proud to receive instruction direct from so great a man.

Fry had already written a little about athletics in certain journals, but in those days it was quite a new thing for famous athletes to contribute to the Press. Fry, indeed, was a pioneer. We approached him to write for the *Captain*, terms were arranged, and he carried on with great success for a long time.

The *Captain* itself was not at first a great success from the commercial point of view, and it was my opinion that it never would be so long as its circulation was confined to schoolboys. Schoolboys have very little money to spend, and are not worth cultivating, therefore, by the big advertiser. So I urged my brother to turn the *Captain* into a purely athletic magazine, aiming at the undergraduate and the medical student and the young clerk instead of mere schoolboys. Advertisers of athletic outfit might then be expected to support the magazine, and the circulation would undoubtedly increase. Unfortunately, my brother could not see eye to eye with me in this matter, the result being—not the consequent but the inconsequent result—that Fry himself edited a magazine for Messrs. Newnes which was called, *C. B. Fry's*

Magazine. My original suggestion, therefore, had resulted in a totally new magazine coming into being, as well as the first one getting valuable help when it was most needed.

The first number of the *Captain* made its appearance just about the time of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, and we turned this to good account. Permission was obtained from the directors of Messrs. Newnes to charter a steam launch for the day of the Boatrace ; and on each side of this launch a placard ran which bore in huge red letters the title of the new magazine—"THE CAPTAIN." Thus decorated, we steamed up and down the four miles of the course all the afternoon, my brother, who was six feet four in his socks, standing proudly on the forward deck. I shall never forget the look of bewilderment on the faces of the rival crews, when, on paddling out to take up their positions, they were confronted with a captain of whom they had never even heard. As for the crowd, I think they were convinced that we were in charge of all the proceedings.

It should have been a good omen that several members of the Dickens family were among our guests on board the launch.

However, I was not yet finished with Oxford. I had still before me the spectre of the Honour School of Theology, one of the stiffest final schools it is possible to take. My second year, as you know, had been occupied with journalism, soldiering, theatricals, and watermanship, and the third with schoolmastering. When I returned to Oxford to keep my last two terms—the Summer Term, which, as I say, counted as two for purposes of residential qualifica-

tion—I had exactly *three* weeks in which to prepare for the ordeal.

My tutor was in despair. “I will give you some papers to answer,” said he, “and find out how much you really do know, and what chance you have got. Don’t look up any books. Just sit down and answer the questions to the best of your ability, and let me have the results.”

I did this, and sent in my papers. A day or two later I was summoned by postcard to attend on my tutor. I found him roaring with laughter!

“Do you,” he said, between mouthfuls of buttered muffin, “do you write for the papers at all?”

I said I did, wondering how so great a man should know so small a thing.

“I thought so!” was his reply. “All these answers are frightfully ingenious, but of course anybody can see you know hardly anything about the subject. Well, we have less than three weeks. Your only chance of getting any sort of class is to go to a private coach for six hours a day.”

My heart sank. A private coach meant money, and I had no money. As for my father, God knows he could not afford to pay for private coaches, or even public ones.

“Well, I know a man—a very clever fellow—who would probably take on the job for five pounds. Can you manage five pounds?”

“Five fiddlesticks! “No, sir, I cannot,” said I.

“Do you think your father would spare five pounds?”

“I don’t think so, sir.”

“Well, I’ll write to him myself and see what he says.”

So he wrote to my father, who replied to the tutor that he would put up the five pounds. That was splendid, and my tutor was much elated. But by the same post my father wrote to me and said that the five pounds in question must come out of my caution money !

This, of course, was impossible. Caution money is the sum paid by every undergraduate to his college as a set-off in the possible event of bad debts to the college, and is never returnable under any circumstances so long as your name remains on the books of the college. I might as well have gone to the Bank of England for the five pounds as endeavour to get it out of my caution money.

Thus ended all hope of a coach, with whose aid I should probably have taken my honours degree and duly proceeded to my examinations for ordination. As it was, my tutor did his best to help me, but rush coaching was not his speciality. He needed time and space. He could not squeeze the juice out of the meat and hand it on to me for quick assimilation.

Came the first day of the examination. I wrote, and wrote, and wrote ! Lord, how I wrote ! I astonished myself with my fertility of ideas. I felt that they would say to each other, " Well, this chap doesn't know much about the text-books, but he seems to be a tryer, he's very much in earnest, and he has some brains. He probably wants to be a parson, and the Church of England could do with a few more parsons who are earnest and intelligent. Let's set his ability against his lack of book-work and give him a Third."

That is exactly what I thought as I wrote, and wrote, and wrote, all through those long summer days.

Four or five days the school lasted, and then one had to wait several weeks before the *viva voce* exam. took place.

I went up to Oxford specially for that. When my name was called out, all three examiners looked up, and grave grins spread over all their three faces. I comported myself—I trust—with dignity. After all, it was not my fault that I had been cut off from all sources of information for a year, whilst other men were being crammed until their little heads were nearly bursting.

My examiner chose to question me on the Book of Isaiah, one of the special subjects, and a frightfully difficult one, let me assure you.

“Can you tell me,” said he, loftily, “in what connection Isaiah alludes to the Arabians?”

I could not. I had not the slightest recollection of any mention of the Arabians in the Book of Isaiah. And here I was right. The prophet does mention them, but not under that name.

My brain was working with great rapidity. I remembered a song entitled, “My Arab Steed.” A lady who sometimes stayed with us loved to sing this song. The title told me all I knew about the Arabians.

“He observes,” I replied, “that they were noted for the excellence of their cavalry.”

The grave grins widened.

“Thank you,” said my examiner with a bow. “I will not trouble you any further.”

I went out, and I went home to await the verdict. The results were published in the *Times* some weeks later. My name was not in the list. I was dead ploughed. They did not want me at all. I was no good.

Came a swift letter to my mother from the aunt who had helped to finance this meteoric career. "Your son John Keble," she wrote, "is a failure in life."

This seemed a little premature. After all, I was still only twenty-one; and I had managed to keep myself for a considerable period. Moreover, I could have taken a pass degree with ease, and not one person in ten thousand ever cares whether a man has taken a pass or honours degree so long as he can write "M.A." after his name.

Many of my friends who knew all the circumstances urged me to take a pass degree. My tutor wrote to the same effect. He pointed out that I could sit for the three pass schools whilst following any other vocation.

But I would not. I had no use for their rotten degree. All I had learnt made me distrust the religion in which I had been brought up. Oxford, at any rate, had done that for me. How could I proceed to Holy Orders when they had robbed me of my faith?

This is not an exaggeration. The vicar of St. Mary's, the University church, at that time was the Rev. Cosmo Gordon Lang, now Archbishop of York. He announced that since the Honour Theological School was concerned only with theology *as a science*, and not *as a religion*, he proposed to institute a series of lectures on the religious side of Theology, and invited all students for the Honour Theological School to attend these lectures, given by himself in the University church.

I did attend them, and very interesting they proved. But they came too late to undo the work of the University.

Another series of lectures I attended were given at Christ Church. These lectures were for the benefit of men who intended proceeding to Holy Orders. A certificate saying that you had attended the course excused you a certain examination for ordination.

The room, naturally, was crowded. But nobody paid the slightest attention to the lectures. Having answered your name, you read a book, or wrote private letters, or amused yourself as you might until the hour was over. At the end of the series you got your certificate, and were on the road to becoming a Church of England parson.

All these fellows no doubt made excellent parsons, but I was disillusioned and disenchanted. When I left Oxford, I had definitely abandoned the very purpose with which I had so eagerly entered the University. Sometimes, in these broader-minded days, I have regretted that I did not go on, but presumably there is something in destiny. Anyway, the Fates seemed quite determined that I should never take Holy Orders. I bowed to the Fates.

Came very speedily the question of the future. The easiest course for any young man finding himself in such a position as mine is to become an usher in a private school. It will not be a first-class school ; his salary will be small ; his duties will be irksome ; the prospects of his ever improving his condition will be very slight.

On the other hand, he secures immediate board and lodging for nine months in the year, and if he is fond of cricket and football he can get plenty of those. Some men really like teaching, and they are the men who get ahead in their profession—a very honourable

profession. But too many young fellows just down from the 'Varsity take up school-mastering merely because it *is* the easiest road. It would be better for them and better for the scholastic profession if they learnt how to break stones and put in an honest day's work at that.

I pride myself on an excellent memory, but the strange thing is that I have now come to a period of my life—the only period—when I cannot precisely remember the order in which things happened. I know that—in addition to the Manchester episode—I was an usher in two private schools. This must have been between 1897, when I left Oxford, and 1899, when I became a fully fledged London journalist. But somewhere in that period I tried my luck in London as a free-lance journalist, and also worked without salary on a provincial paper in order to get the experience demanded by all newspaper proprietors in London.

It is quite useless. I have worried over the dates of these things until I refuse to bother about them any more. I will therefore describe briefly my adventures as a free-lance in London, and as a sub-editor at Bicester, in Oxfordshire.

I don't know how much money I had when I made my first attack on London. It must have been very little—certainly not more than a pound or two. To be sure, there was always my home at Henley-in-Arden, but I would have been very unhappy and out of place there. Brothers and sisters had been steadily arriving ever since we made that triumphant progress from Basingstoke; and the value of the living had not increased to any marked degree. What should a

healthy young fellow of two-and-twenty be doing at an over-crowded table?

Besides, one had one's pride—in fact, one had rather more pride than was good for one. All very well to meet the friends and acquaintances of your youth when you have taken the world by the throat and shaken a good living out of it ; a very different matter when the world is plainly showing that she has no particular use for you.

Whatever happened, therefore, I would not go home ; nor would I ask help from home. That was decided, and I never broke my resolve. Except for the period of education, I had no financial help from anybody.

Behold me, then, very tall, very thin, very keen, very poor, and not too hopeful, in the great whirlpool of London. I first attempted to get a regular job in a newspaper office. To this end I secured interviews with Mr. Leicester Harmsworth (now a baronet) ; the late Peter Keary ; and Mr. Galloway Fraser, of the firm of George Newnes, Limited.

Mr. Leicester Harmsworth asked me what practical experience I had had. His manner was not encouraging. He little knew that one day, some years later, we were to be intimately associated in one of his greatest ventures.

I replied that I had had no practical experience in an office, but that I had written for some of the journals issued by his firm, and that I was willing to do anything to get a footing in journalism.

“ You don't mean *anything*,” he said.

“ I do,” I replied.

“ Anything ?”

“ Anything.”

“ Would you do up parcels and sweep out the office?”

“ Certainly.”

“ Well, I’m afraid we have no use here for Oxford men.”

That was the trouble. It was Oxford that stuck in their throats. Peter Keary and Galloway Fraser made precisely the same answer. I took cuttings with me of my work, and proved to them that I must understand their readers because I had actually written for their journals and been paid by them.

“ Yes,” said Mr. Galloway Fraser, “ this stuff is all right, but there’s too much Oxford about it. Send me anything you write that seems suitable, but I can’t offer you a regular job.”

Peter Keary took up the same attitude. Heavens, the amount of work I have done for both their firms since those unhappy days!

Well, things were looking pretty black. I had secured a room in York Buildings, Adelphi, at the fairly reasonable rate of four shillings a week. It was a top room—I suppose one might call it an attic without exaggeration—and had no fireplace. Not that I had any use for a fireplace, save as a ventilating shaft.

One condition was attached to the renting of this room. It was compulsory to take breakfast in the house at the rate of one shilling each day. This was a serious matter. To spend a whole shilling on one meal each day was extravagance, but there was no help for it.

The breakfast was brought to one’s room and put outside the door. You then scrambled it in, hopped

back into bed for warmth, and breakfasted in bed. With the shilling breakfast came the rejected articles and stories, all addressed to yourself in your own beautiful handwriting.

I discovered that the sausage breakfast was the best value for money, and I therefore demanded sausages each morning. Two sausages were provided. One I used to consume then and there, and the other I would lock up in my trunk, together with a piece of bread and some salt. This was my supper, and thus I got two meals for the price of one.

Unfortunately, when you are two-and-twenty, and just on six-feet-two in height, and have to walk about the streets because you have nowhere else to go, you get confoundedly hungry in the middle of the day. It is said that people can satisfy a craving for food by standing outside cook-shops and sniffing up the warm odours of cooking. It is not true. I tried it again and again, and the slight feeling of nausea did not take the place of solid food.

And then, one glorious day, I discovered the remedy. It was quite an accident. I went into an A.B.C. shop and studied the list of eatables. "Lunch cake—1d." caught my attention. I ordered a portion, and was delighted with the size and substance of it. Milk was cheaper than tea or coffee, and so I made an excellent lunch off lunch-cake and a glass of milk. This, on the top of a sausage, with another sausage to follow at night, was high living, and only cost, in all, one-and-tuppence a day.

I felt that I could hang on for quite a long time if only somebody would accept something and pay for it quickly. But they would not. I don't know why.

Perhaps my literary style was cramped by my surroundings. I had no typewriter, of course, and could not afford to have my efforts typed. I wrote everything on the cheapest paper, in my attic, and delivered them by hand to save the cost of double postage.

They came back with sickening and disheartening regularity. One paper did accept an article and printed it. But they never paid for it. The paper was in a bad way, and presently disappeared altogether.

Another paper printed a very lively interview I wrote ; but they did not pay on the nail. They had a certain pay-day, aeons away, and could not depart from their rule to pay on that day. I said it didn't matter in the least, and walked out with a jaunty air. But I was faint from want of food, and my head was swimming as I went down the stairs.

To make matters worse, the people who ran the house where I had my four-shilling attic began to get restive. Perhaps they thought I was poor. An impertinent inference, but correct. There was a staircase window opposite my window, and in the centre of this staircase window was a circular pane of plain glass, the rest being coloured or glazed. One morning, as I lay in bed eating my sausage, I saw a face at this circular pane of clear glass. It was watching me with intentness, and, I thought, hostility. I stared back at it, for I knew the owner. He was the husband of the housekeeper. Doubtless he suspected me of locking up one of my sausages in my trunk, and resented this sharp practice.

Anyway, shortly after that it was intimated that my tenancy must expire. So I went in search of another attic, and found one in Buckingham Street, just one

street away. Here the same rule as to breakfast applied. I still paid four shillings a week for my room, but I must take a shilling breakfast each morning, and I must take it downstairs with the rest of the lodgers.

The majority of these lodgers had left the house before I came down to breakfast, and I never saw them. But two gentlemen always took their breakfast at the same time as myself, and I was secretly thrilled by them. They were theatrical managers ! One had the first-floor set, and the other the ground-floor. The number of letters they received each morning was astounding, and the nonchalance with which they opened them, often reading the contents aloud, seemed to me the last word in cynical success.

How I longed to ask them for a job in one of their companies ! But I never did, although the first-floor gentleman had started many Oxford men on successful theatrical careers, notably the late H. B. Irving—of whom I shall have more to say at a later stage of this history.

Why did I not pluck up my courage and say, “Excuse me, gentlemen, but I am very anxious to go on the stage, and if you could—” ?

No. I rehearsed the scene over and over again, and always I saw at the far end of the table two astonished faces, gradually reddening with annoyance, and always I heard the complaint in response, “Can’t a man have his breakfast in peace without being dunned for a job ?”

And so I never spoke a word to either of them beyond, “Good morning.” In later years I came to know both of them, but I never identified myself with the lean and pallid youth who modestly ate his shilling breakfast at the far end of the table in Buckingham

Street. Both these managers are alive and flourishing to-day, and both have names that are household words throughout the theatrical profession, and wherever there are people who take an interest in the theatre. I see no reason why I should not give those names. The first-floor gentleman was Mr. Ben Greet, and his friend and colleague Mr. J. Bannister Howard, who is reputed to have made a fortune out of "Tons of Money" and other ventures.

In the meantime, my luck did not change, and I was getting in debt to the good folk who kept the house in Buckingham Street. Defeat stared me in the face. London, it seemed, had no use for me. I was inexperienced. How I grudged the time and money I had wasted at Oxford! Any young fellow who had been put into a newspaper-office at sixteen was worth his place in London, but I was not.

But how to get that experience? One went round and round in a vicious circle. Nobody would have me because I had not been in an office; and I could not get into an office because I had never been in an office. That was the riddle I had to solve.

And I did solve it. I solved it myself, and I will tell you how I did it. Never, in writing this book, do I lose sight of the fact that my adventures may be of use to some young fellow in a similar plight. Indeed, that is my main justification for writing it.

I suddenly bethought me of the little town of Bicester, near Oxford. I knew this little town because one of my mother's sisters had married a farmer—and a very good friend to me he proved, and a very good friend he is still, bless his heart—who had a farm about a mile from Bicester.

In Bicester was published a little weekly paper called the *Bicester Advertiser*, owned by a Mr. Pankhurst, who also bred horses and kept a stationer's shop. I had visited my aunt and uncle at their farm during some vacation, and I had written one or two little paragraphs for the *Bicester Advertiser*. I wondered if Mr. Pankhurst would let me sit in his office, sub-edit the paper, write whatsoever might be required, and thus gain the practical experience by which London editors set so much store?

I wrote to my aunt and set forth my scheme. I admitted that I was not as yet rich, but I could afford to pay something for my board, and I would teach my small boy cousin, aged about six.

I had the fare to Bicester, but that was all I had. And I owed a certain amount to my landlady. This gave me anxious thought. I could not expect her to allow me, a complete stranger, to give up my room and remove my luggage whilst still in her debt, and yet it would not be very dignified to arrive at Bicester without luggage. What was to be done?

My aunt wrote a kind letter, approving the scheme. I gathered that I could pay her the very small sum she named for my board—and farming in those days, let me remind you, was not the quickest way in the world to a fortune—whenever it was convenient. This decided the matter. I left a note for my landlady, explaining that I had been “called away from London on urgent business,” and requesting her to take care of my gear until my return, when I would settle her small bill. The room might be let forthwith.

When I arrived at Bicester, my aunt naturally asked what had become of my luggage. I said it was being

sent on. As luck would have it, the paper that owed me money paid up a few days after that, and I was able to settle up with the good people at Buckingham Street and get my baggage sent on to Bicester.

It now remained to tackle Mr. Pankhurst. I walked into his shop one morning and reminded him of my identity. He remembered me, which was fortunate.

“I want to work on your paper,” I proceeded.

Mr. Pankhurst seemed a little startled.

“Without salary,” I added. “The idea is to get experience. When I leave you, all I ask is that you will write me a thumping good testimonial. In the meantime, I’ll write as much of the paper as you like, read the proofs, and, if necessary, learn to set type. What do you say?”

Mr. Pankhurst deliberated for a few moments, and then agreed with the scheme. I was straightway appointed assistant-editor of the *Bicester Advertiser*, unpaid. I thought Pankhurst a sportsman. I doubt if he would ask any higher praise than that. What Englishman would?

There was a very wee room in between the shop and the type-setting department. In this wee room was a high desk and a high stool to match. I perched myself on this high stool, rather to the amusement of the young lady behind the counter, who could see me very well through the glass partition, and that was my place all the time I remained on the staff of the *Bicester Advertiser*.

The circulation of the paper was not large. I don’t know what it was, but I decided that it must be raised. Mr. Pankhurst looked a little doubtful, and asked me how I proposed to raise it.

“We must have,” I said, “more ginger in it. At present it seems to me too mild. You are far too nice and genial. We must get up a discussion—make ‘em talk about the paper. Now, what is the greatest bone of contention in the town?”

“The waterworks,” said Pankhurst.

“Are there waterworks?”

“No, there are not.”

“What? No waterworks? But, my dear sir, every town should have waterworks! You agree with that, don’t you?”

“Well, up to the present, I’ve been against ‘em,” admitted Pankhurst. “You see, the cost will put a lot on the rates, and—”

“But the waterworks are bound to come! You can’t do without them. The health of every soul in Bicester depends on pure water. Now, let’s take up a firm attitude about the waterworks. Let’s insist that waterworks are essential. I’ll write a strong article, and we’ll print all the letters that come, for and against. Up will go the circulation of the paper, and you’ll be saving Bicester at the same time!”

He agreed. I told you he was a sportsman. He let me write the article, and it duly appeared in the next number. Then the fat was in the fire. They all knew, of course, that some youngster from Oxford had arrived on the scene, and the opponents of the waterworks were furious that the influence of the *‘Tizer* should be thrown into the scale against them. The letters poured in.

These letters had to be answered editorially, so I got Pankhurst to let me start another feature called, “Local Comments.” He agreed. In this column I

let myself go to my heart's content. We had everybody on the rack. They never knew what was coming out next. I even had the audacity to criticise the sermons preached at the parish church by the rector, who was a tremendous fellow.

There was one gentleman who swore to have my blood. He lived outside the radius, but it so happened that he would have to contribute to the maintenance of the waterworks although he would derive no direct benefit from them. He wrote passionate letters to the paper, all of which we printed, and to all of which I replied in "Local Comments."

My replies increased his fury. On one occasion, I was told, he took a copy of the paper to the meeting of the District Council, held it aloft, and beat at it with his clenched fist. That was exactly what I wanted. The *'Tizer* was having a grand advertisement, and the sales must have leapt up.

But still I was not satisfied. I wanted to get the feminine readers. So I started a serial story, the scene of which was laid in Bicester. Into this story I introduced well-known local characters, thinly disguised. If I remember rightly, the lady who presided over the saloon-bar at the leading hotel—a very beautiful damsel—was the heroine. Given a hero whom everybody could recognise, and you will understand how eagerly the town waited for the next instalment.

I knew enough of the business to leave off each week at a frightfully exciting point. Possibly the auctioneer had just taken a pistol from his desk and was about to shoot the sexton. I merely give that as a sample. People I met always tried to pump me about the forthcoming chapter, but I was never drawn.

I also started a column of "Hunting Notes," Bicester being a famous hunting centre. So is my part of Warwickshire, and I knew more or less what to write and how to write it. "Agricultural Notes" was a popular feature, and I touched up all the little notices from local correspondents. On press-day I read and revised all the proofs, so the life was not an idle one.

In the meanwhile, I was teaching my young cousin to read and write, and learning a little—a very little—about farming. It was a good life, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. But there was no money in it.

And then one morning came a letter from London which was destined to set me on the road to such success as I may have attained.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRESS ASSOCIATION

THE letter came from a friend of my brother's, Mr. Josiah Oddy. Oddy was a barrister by day, and at night he was a sub-editor on the Press Association. I had met him in London on several occasions, and he knew that I was pretty desperate to get some sort of a job in Fleet Street.

His letter informed me that there was a vacancy for a junior sub-editor on the night editorial staff of the Press Association, that he had spoken to the manager Mr. Edmund Robbins (afterwards Sir Edmund) about me, and that Mr. Robbins would accord me an interview. Oddy advised to waste no time in applying for the job if I wanted it.

Here was the opportunity for Pankhurst to fulfil his promise. I told him the circumstances, and he at once sat down and wrote me a testimonial the like of which the world has seldom seen. Meanwhile, I hastily finished off the serial story, flinging all the right people into the correct arms. I bade farewell to my aunt, uncle, and nephew, thanked my aunt and uncle very warmly for their great kindness, promised to look them up soon, and so set my face once more towards London.

This took place in the closing days of 1898. Cash in hand after paying my fare to London was pre-

cisely two pounds, and no more to come from anywhere unless I got the job on the P. A. Not wishing to advertise that fact, I bought a new collar, put it on in the shop, and then made my way to New Bridge Street.

Mr. Robbins did not precisely leap at me. He did not say that for years and years the Press Association had been looking for a young man with keen imagination and a great intellect, and that I was obviously that man. No. He asked me what experience I had had in a newspaper office.

Of course, I was ready for that. I told him I was hot from the offices of the *Bicester Advertiser*, and proudly produced the testimonial which dear old Pankhurst and myself had together concocted.

Mr. Robbins read it through with care; and then handed it back to me. Even now he showed no traces of excitement. He said that he had not the pleasure of Mr. Pankhurst's acquaintance—which was his loss—and that the *Bicester Advertiser* did not derive its information from the Press Association.

He proceeded to tell me more about the Press Association. A man who entered the service of that very great and powerful organisation usually remained in that service all his working life, thus testifying to his esteem for his employers and his position. The work was of the utmost responsibility, and must never on any occasion be approached in a spirit of levity.

I assured him, for my part, that I would leave any levity to which I might feel disposed in the street without, and earnestly endeavour in all ways, should I be engaged, to justify his confidence.

In the end, he offered me a month's engagement on trial. My salary was to be two pounds fifteen shillings a week, and my working hours would be from seven o'clock in the evening until two o'clock the following morning. This also applied to Saturday night, but not to Sunday. On Sunday I should commence work at three in the afternoon, and be free as air at ten o'clock the same night. Monday evening would be my night off, and the month of probation would commence on the first of January, 1899.

We parted on excellent terms. At least, I felt very well disposed towards Mr. Robbins, who was the first man in London to pluck up sufficient courage to give me a job. But I would never have had it, mind you, had I not qualified by sitting on that high stool in the little office of the *Bicester Advertiser*.

The next step was to find a place to lay my head. And here I was fortunate enough to meet Mr. Artemus Jones, now a distinguished K.C., and then a sub-editor on the *Daily Telegraph*. Artemus Jones had a set of chambers in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, a most convenient spot for a man who had to work till two in the morning. (In those days, papers went to press much later than now).

Artemus Jones mentioned that he had a spare bedroom at his chambers, and suggested that I should take it from him at a small rental and share the wages of the laundress. I was only too glad to accept. Our sitting-room was really a beautiful apartment, the walls lined with tapestry, and the large windows looking over the Square and the gardens.

The position at the rear was less happy. Building operations were in process, and work started each

morning at six o'clock. Jones and I both worked until two o'clock. We would then stroll into the Press Club for a pipe and a chat with our fellow-workers before going to bed, so that at the earliest we were seldom in bed before four in the morning.

No sooner, it seemed to me, did I lay my head on the pillow than those infernal workmen began calling to each other in cheery tones and tapping on bricks with their trowels. To this day I never hear the ring of a trowel against a brick without thinking of those sleepless mornings. And that, of course, is the reason why night-work is so injurious to the health. Some men can sleep as well in the daytime as at night, but the majority cannot, wherefore night-work has been the undoing of many and many an unfortunate toiler.

But the workmen were not the only curse. Our own laundress, oddly enough, also murdered sleep. She used to arrive about eight o'clock to tidy up the place and cook breakfast. She then had to make our beds, and the grievance of her life was that we were in them till eleven or twelve o'clock.

Up to about ten she would keep fairly quiet, and then she got to work with the broom. Supposed to be sweeping the passage, she really used the broom to bang viciously at our doors. When the banging had no effect, she would groan aloud—terrible, heart-rending groans—and walk to and fro muttering to herself, “They never *will* get up! Oh, dear! They never *will* get up!”

One evening, on coming into the chambers before dinner, I missed my overcoat. It was rather a good overcoat, and one wanted an overcoat on turning

out of a hot office at two in the morning. My silk scarf was also missing—a pink and black scarf, the Worcester College colours. Then Jones came home and missed certain articles.

They never turned up again. Neither did our cheerful laundress.

While I think of it, I should like to tell of a curious adventure which befell my friend Artemus Jones, all the more curious because the result of it affects every writer of fiction to this day. Everybody knows that the modern novelist is careful to print a little foreword to his book explaining that all the characters are purely fictitious. This has been necessary ever since Artemus Jones brought an action for libel against a certain newspaper and was awarded fifteen hundred pounds damages.

His name is not a common one—the complete name, I mean—and the offence was aggravated by the fact that Jones himself regularly contributed to this very paper a signed weekly article. And yet a writer in that paper used the name “Artemus Jones” when he wanted to picture a gay English Lothario on the race-course at Paris!

Jones, as I say, brought an action against the paper, and with his fifteen hundred pounds sent himself to the Bar and became a K.C. And now we all have to explain that our characters are fictitious. If that is not romantic, you shall tell me a better one when we meet.

Everybody is familiar with Sir Arthur Pinero’s famous play, “The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.” Ebbsmith is a queer name, you will admit. Sir Arthur concocted it out of his own head, and felt that he was

safe. The name was suggested to him by the surname of that celebrated organist, Flood-Jones. Pinero twisted Flood-Jones into Ebb-Smith. But a poor lady named Ebbsmith thought the dramatist had drawn a portrait of herself, and either committed or attempted to commit suicide. At least, that is the story as it was told to me years ago, and merely serves as a warning to any young writer of fiction who chances across this history.

At length came my first night's work at the Press Association. I was directed to the second or third floor, and found myself in a room already occupied by six or seven members of the night editorial.

In the chair was Sam Harvey, surely the most imperturbable man who ever held a post of great responsibility in Fleet Street. Night after night, between the hours of five and twelve, Harvey sat in that editorial chair, passing in review all the news the world had to furnish. I do not mean to imply that he read it all, nor was that necessary, as I will explain in a moment. But he certainly read the bulk of the home news, and he knew what the rest was about.

There must still be many people who wonder how all the news gets into the newspapers. A course in the night editorial at the P.A. would have enlightened them. The foreign news came through Reuter's Agency. It arrived, in the first place, on the tape, and was followed up by corroborative flimsies which we called the "blues."

London papers had their Reuter service direct, but the provincial papers received it through the P.A. I don't know why. It seemed to me a clumsy and unnecessary arrangement, particularly as it was usually my

job to copy all this matter off the tape on to flimsies, whence it went to the Post Office to be telegraphed to the provincial journals. A condensed version of this matter was then made for smaller papers, and a still more condensed version for the very smallest papers.

A flimsy, by the way, is simply a wad of transparent paper interleaved with carbons. You fix it with a clip to a sloping metal-covered writing-desk, and you write on it with a stylus. The Reuter flimsies were easy to write on, being merely eight thick, but the daily London paper flimsies were eighteen thick, which increased to twenty-four thick on Saturday nights—my pet night. To get through twenty-four sheets and their corresponding carbons needed the strength of a giant, and when you went on doing it for hour after hour you began to wonder how much navvies were paid, and what they had to grumble at in life.

When I arrived at the office at seven o'clock, the tape had generally been running freely for some little time. Everybody hated the tape ; it was sheer monotony to copy the stuff down as it stood, for Reuter's sub-editing was very accurate. So the click of the tape meant a complete absorption of the whole staff in some other matter, and the tape ticked on and ticked on until Sam Harvey named the victim—generally myself, being the junior sub-editor.

I would then go into the next room and collect the tape, which had massed itself on the floor like a ten-mile boa-constrictor. Having found the business end, I would start on my task, writing ninety-eight words to each flimsy. I have written as much as six thousand words in one evening from Reuter's tape

on to Post Office forms. Anybody who thinks that a light evening's work has my permission to go and have a shot at it.

But it was better than schoolmastering.

So much for the foreign news. In the meantime, the home news was pouring in from our own correspondents in every part of the kingdom. All this Harvey had to handle, and pass on to one of the sub-editors to be licked into shape, titled, copied on to flimsies, and sent round by messengers to the London morning dailies. A digest of it was telegraphed to the provincial papers in the same proportion as the Reuter intelligence.

The big speeches were reported by a "gang" of our own reporters, who were really the swells of the Agency. They rarely came near the sub-editorial department. When they did, we treated them as heroes of the field. They were supposed to earn very handsome salaries, and there is no disputing that a first-class reporter, who can take a swift and accurate note, *verbatim*, of an important speech which all the world is waiting to read, must be a man of wide information and exceptional ability.

We had nothing to do with these speeches, or with the Parliamentary reports, which went out from the House direct.

One mysterious and romantic person on our staff had special permission to sit in the House of Lords and take a note of their lordships' observations, and the same man used to penetrate even to Buckingham Palace itself, where he would hobnob with the "Court Newsman," that being the gentleman who is responsible, I believe, for the Court Circulars.

Sporting and financial news were dealt with, also, from outside.

The occasions I liked best, because they gave me a chance to get away from a rather stuffy room and show what I could do on my own, were those when a sensational piece of news was brought in by a "runner." A runner is simply an Autolycus of the streets, who knows there is a half-crown to be earned if he can be first in at the news agencies with some happening worth reporting in the papers. Naturally, he exaggerates the value of his news in order to impress the Agency, but he does not get his money until the matter has been duly investigated and written up.

As these runners invariably arrived after the reporting staff had finished their work and gone home, I was the fellow sent to enquire into the matter, and to make a story of it if there was a story in it. No limit was put to the time, except in rare cases. If I was too late for the morning papers, the evening papers would probably accord the story more generous space. Whichever way it went, however, it was all in the night's work.

One night—I rather think a Sunday night—a runner brought the information that a murder had taken place in the East End. He said that a man who had been separated from his wife had met her in the street. She was carrying their baby. The story ran that the man had produced a pistol, fired at his wife, and killed the baby, and that the crowd had then tried to lynch him. He had been rescued from that fate by the police.

All this seemed to make a noise like a story, so Harvey packed me off to inquire into the matter.

Brick Lane was said to be the scene of the tragedy. They were not unaccustomed to tragedies in Brick Lane. Some of the worst of the Whitechapel murders—Jack the Ripper's murders—took place in that jolly little street.

I took train to Aldgate and walked from that station to Brick Lane. Being a trifle doubtful about my costume, I turned up the collar of my overcoat and pushed my hat to the back of my head. These alterations, I flattered myself, would pass me in safety through the most ruffianly crowd.

Brick Lane seemed very quiet, so I entered a public-house on the corner and ordered some beer. There were plenty of people in the public-house, one of whom I invited to join me in a drink. He accepted at once, and we raised our glasses to each other in the approved manner.

“By-the-way,” I said casually, “have you heard anything of a murder down this way this evening?”—much as one might ask if the weather had been keeping tolerably fine.

“*Murder?*” repeated my friend, laying absurd emphasis on the word. Of all things, I wanted no fuss made about such a trivial matter.

“Yes,” I nodded. “I just heard it mentioned. Thought possibly you might know something about it.”

“Why should I know anything about a murder?”

“Of course not,” I said, soothingly. “Why should you? Say no more about it. I must be moving on myself.”

“Wait a bit,” advised my friend. “’Ere! Miss!”

The barmaid turned languidly. She was at the far end of the bar.

“ ‘Ave you ‘eard anything of a *murder* down this way ternight?” bawled my acquaintance.

Instantly the whole crowd surged in our direction. What did they take me for? A detective? Would they do me in and hide the body in the cellar?

“ *Murder?*” echoed the barmaid in shrill tones. “ No, I ain’t ‘eard nothing of no murder, not ternight. ‘Oo’s bin murdered nah, then?”

Forty pair of eyes were fixed on me. I decided to gain the street at all costs.

“ Probably nobody,” I replied. “ In any case, it’s of no consequence. Goodnight!” And with that I slipped through the swing door.

This was all very well, but I could not return to the office without some sort of a story. Another agency might get hold of it, and I would have disgraced myself and the P.A.

Suddenly I thought of the hospital. If there had been any shooting, they must know of it at the hospital. So I made my way thither, and asked what emergency cases had come in that evening.

I was in luck. The porter directed my attention to the book in which all such events were entered. Reading rapidly down the list, I found, to my joy, that a young woman had been brought in suffering from a revolver wound. I tipped the porter, told him my business, and he advised me to call at the Commercial Road police station.

Off I went, and had no sooner gained the charge-room than I spotted my man. He was an undersized Jew, very frightened, very dirty, and the pocket of his coat had a hole in it that looked very much as

though it had been caused by firing a bullet from the inside.

The inspector was putting questions to the man, and I listened.

“Good thing we came along,” observed a constable. “They’d ‘ave done you in in another tick.”

The attempt at lynching! Excellent! Presently the little fellow was taken to a cell, and the inspector then observed myself.

“What do *you* want?” he asked.

I told him, modestly, that I represented all the London newspapers, and that it was our wish to prevent any exaggerated account of the affair getting into the papers. The inspector pointed out that his lips were sealed, and kept telling me to go away. But I was persistent, and eventually had the whole story—or pretty well the whole story. I returned in triumph to the office, wrote it up, and had the satisfaction of seeing it on the posters of the evening papers the next day.

You might suppose that men engaged on such tasks as I have described would be as serious as a diocesan conference. Not at all. The stories and laughter and chatting were incessant. Sam Harvey might almost have been the chairman at a smoking concert. Most of us smoked clay pipes, and we took it in turns to send across to the Ludgate Hill bar for pints of ale for the company—or for such members of it as drank ale. I know I was very glad of that refreshment, and also of the plate of cold beef I used to consume each night about eleven. I could never have got through the work without it.

One of the more serious workers was Mr. H. C.

Robbins, son of the manager, and now himself joint general manager. We were quite good friends, but I think he had a small opinion of my prospects as a serious journalist. So had I. No doubt we were both right.

Mr. Josiah Oddy, my kind sponsor, faced Mr. Harvey, and other names I remember after six-and-twenty years were Brimmell, Lowe, Newlands, and Walling. I learnt about life from all of them.

My month soon passed away, but I heard nothing from the manager, so I stayed on, wondering when, if ever, I should be appointed to the staff. As it happened, I never was. A paragraph in an evening paper intervened.

CHAPTER VIII

FORTUNE GRINS BROADLY

JUST about the time I went up to Oxford there appeared the first issue of a weekly illustrated paper on new lines. It was called the *Sketch*—a happy title for a happy idea. It was a sixpenny paper, and therefore ranked with the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*. But it was not so serious as either. Indeed, it was hardly serious at all. The *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic* gave the public pictorial presentments of the news they had read in the daily-press—and the daily press of those days was extremely serious. The *Sketch*, on the other hand, gave the public all the light side of life. At the same time, it was artistic, well written, and illustrated by the best humorous black-and-white artists of the day. In short, it was the *Sketch* as you know it to-day.

To a youth of eighteen with a turn for letters and a passion for the theatre the *Sketch* naturally made a strong appeal. Week by week I followed its career in the smoking-room at the Union, and once or twice I was successful in getting a contribution into its columns. I used to think, wistfully, that life on the staff of such a paper would indeed be a dream of bliss.

I had been about six months in the night editorial of the Press Association when, in a rare idle moment, I happened to read a paragraph in the *Westminster*

Gazette. This paragraph stated that Mr. Clement Shorter had resigned the editorship of the *Illustrated London News* and the *Sketch* in order to found a new weekly illustrated paper, and that Mr. J. M. Bulloch would accompany him to these fresh pastures. Mr. Shorter's place had been taken by Mr. John Latey, for many years editor of the *Penny Illustrated Paper*, but no assistant to Mr. Latey on the *Sketch* had yet been appointed.

Secretly, I became very excited. I felt convinced that I was the precise man for the job. True, I knew nothing whatever about the reproduction of pictures, but that could surely be learnt. I had written for the *Sketch*; I had followed the theatre and written dramatic criticisms for years.

On the other hand, I was not particularly interested in the work I was doing. Any fairly intelligent office-boy could have done this junior task just as well, and the salary was not over-poweringly great. I determined to have a shot for the job on the *Sketch*.

The trouble was that I did not know Latey, and he, of course, had never even heard of my existence. Somehow or other, I must get an introduction to him.

I remembered that my brother had once interviewed Latey—I think for the *Evening News*. So I posted round to the *Captain* office next morning, only to find that the editor had gone down to Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, to attend a bazaar which my people were holding to raise funds for the restoration of the parish church.

I said to his assistant: “I want an introduction to Latey.”

“After that *Sketch* job?”

"Yes. No harm in having a shot."

"You'd better hurry up. Latey's seeing men every day. Your brother has sent two along to him."

"Has he? Well, he might have thought of me."

"He probably thought you hadn't got enough experience."

Clearly, I, too, must go to Henley-in-Arden. But what about my work at the P.A.? That night I explained to Harvey that I wanted about eighteen hours away from London—but I did not reveal the reason. I suggested that I could catch the newspaper train at Paddington after doing my ordinary night's work, and that I could get back in time to work the all-night shift instead of my own. Harvey said if I could arrange with the all-night man he had no objection to the scheme.

So five o'clock in the morning saw me at Paddington, and a few hours later I arrived, quite unexpected, at Henley-in-Arden. I at once tackled my brother on the subject of an introduction to Latey, but he seemed very doubtful as to my capabilities. This, as you know, is a common fraternal point of view.

"Well," I said, "it lets you in for nothing. All I want from you is a line of introduction. If I can get to see Latey, it's up to me to make a good impression on him, and it's up to him to decide whether I should be useful to him or not. If he makes a mistake that isn't your fault."

At length he consented to write the note, so that my journey had not been in vain. Having the rest of the day before me, I determined to stop for the opening of the bazaar, which was to be performed by no less a personage than Marie Corelli, then at the

very height of her fame and living at Stratford-on-Avon.

She drove herself over from Stratford in her pony-carriage, drawn by the famous pair of miniature ponies. With her was Franklin McLeay, the fine Canadian actor who subsequently worked himself to death—literally to death—organising a matinee in aid of the sufferers in the Ottawa disaster. McLeay told me some years later—shortly before his death, in fact—that he was staying with Marie Corelli at the time of which I am writing in order to collaborate with her on a play—I think a dramatized version of “The Sorrows of Satan.” But I doubt if he ever appeared in it.

We all trooped up to the bazaar-ground, and Marie Corelli made a very charming and graceful little speech, standing on a box for the purpose. She was quite short, and very fair, with blue eyes and a most dignified bearing.

When the opening ceremony was concluded, she made a number of purchases and I was then presented.

“Take me into the shade,” said Miss Corelli, “and see if you can get me some tea.”

Here was an honour! I took her into the shade of a great elm, got her some tea, and then we had a considerable talk. She confided to me that she had been dreadfully nervous about the speech, as she had never before spoken in public. She had studied elocution for singing, but not for speaking.

I immediately sensed a scoop. “This may impress Latey,” I thought, so I committed the speech to paper, added a little impressionist sketch, and returned to London to do my midnight to eight in the morning

shift—which included a summary of the *Times* City column! I hope the readers in the far-off provincial towns were duly edified and enriched.

The next morning I called on Latey. He prided himself on his likeness to King Edward VII, and he was justified. I am sure he was often mistaken for the king, for he had a kingly manner, to which was wedded a most kindly heart.

His first question, after reading the letter of introduction, was a rather surprising one.

“Have you,” he said, “ever done any dramatic criticism?”

I told him of my adventures in that connection with the *Oxford Magazine* and the *Oxford Review*, being most careful to conceal the fact that I had been to Oxford *in statu pupillari*. I knew what they thought of Oxford as a training-ground for journalists in the newspaper-offices of London. (I may say here that I had been on the staff of the *Sketch* for two years before anybody in the office discovered that I had been to Oxford.)

“Very good,” said Latey, with a courteous bow. “Very interesting. But I was thinking of London papers. Have you written any dramatic criticism for any London daily paper?”

By the greatest good fortune, I had. Mr. S. R. Littlewood was at that time the dramatic critic of the *Morning Leader*, and I had once deputised for him at some revival or minor production. It was not much to boast about, but I made the most of it.

“May I see the notice you wrote?” asked Latey.

I had kept no copy of it, but I swore to get one even if I had to carve it from the office file of the *Morning*

Leader. Away I went down Fleet Street at a pace that would have astonished Doctor Johnson, and all the time I was saying to myself, "By Jove! If he gives me a chance!"

I was lucky enough to get a copy of the issue I wanted, and with this in my pocket I rushed back to Latey. He asked me to leave it with him, and also some other specimens of my work.

A day or two later I received a letter asking me to call again. What could this mean? Was it to hand me back my cuttings? But he could have sent them by post. Was it to—? No, I refused to raise my hopes.

Latey received me with his customary bow.

"I have looked through your writings," he said, "and I think you might be useful to me on the *Sketch* as my assistant-editor. But I could not offer you a definite engagement. The best I could offer would be three months' trial."

"Oh, certainly," I said.

"But how about your position on the Press Association? There you seem to have a definite niche; and such berths are not too easy to obtain in Fleet Street."

"I'll risk it," I replied.

"Hadn't you better take time to think the matter over?"

"No, thank you," was my answer.

"Very well. Of course, I must lay the matter before my directors. And now with regard to the question of salary?"

I told him what I was receiving from the P.A., and he said he could improve on that. And he did improve on it. In short, he more than doubled it. More-

over, he accepted the Marie Corelli speech and interview right away, and sent it down to the printer before my very eyes. It appeared in the *Sketch* for July 26, 1899, since which date (and here I firmly grasp my table) there has not been an issue of the paper without a contribution from my pen.

Once again I waited, and then came a second letter appointing me as assistant-editor, for three months on trial, at the agreed salary.

I was now in clover—for the first time in my life. No man ever worked for a more kindly-hearted chief. In the history of journalism, I suppose, there have occasionally been editors who were chary of allowing their subordinates too many opportunities of displaying their talents. There was nothing of that sort about Latey. He kept me busy with my pen, and paid me at the usual rates of the paper for everything I wrote outside editorial matter. That was the rule of the office.

I wrote dramatic criticisms, reviews of books, short stories, verses, and interviews. I was in and out of Latey's room all day long, and never once did his courtesy, and good temper, and kindly encouragement fail.

The editorial offices in those days were in Milford Lane; and the printing-works are still in the same building. When you ascend the stairs from the Milford Lane entrance, there is a tiny room at the top of the first flight of stairs, and to the right. That was the room I occupied, my predecessor being J. M. Bulloch. Bulloch had covered the walls of this little room with panel photographs of lovely actresses (I hope he won't mind my recalling this now that he is a grave and

learned doctor). I continued the good work begun by Bulloch, and covered the ceiling with the beauties of the English and American stage.

My stable-companion in this room was one Eden, who had been a sailor, but renounced the sea for Fleet Street, and was now the assistant-editor of the *Penny Illustrated Paper*. Eden's task was comparatively light except on press-day, and then he would be almost beside himself with energy. He was devoted to Latey, and Latey was devoted to the *P.I.P.*, which he had edited from its foundation forty years previously.

I can see Eden now, haring in and out, his mouth full of pins, both hands full of proofs, his face very red, his hair disordered. It was as much as my life was worth to speak a word to him on press-day. But when the little *P.I.P.* had been put to bed for another week, all the anxiety and excitement would vanish in a twinkling. Eden would light his pipe, put his legs on the table, and there, once again, was the casual jolly sailor-man.

I think my chief impressions of those days are of Eden dashing about to get the *P.I.P.* to bed, and Latey, entirely surrounded by masses of photographs, drawings, manuscripts, proofs, and correspondence, gravely bowing as one entered the room, and looking more and more like the king every day.

And then, as near as a toucher, the whole thing threatened to come to a sudden termination. The Boer War broke out, and I conceived it my duty to volunteer. I did, in fact, write to a friend who had been with me in the Oxford University Corps, and suggest that he should put forward my name in conjunction with his own. Not that I had the least desire

to give up this valuable and delightful post the moment I had obtained it. Conscience was at the bottom of the matter, and conscience is responsible for many apparent follies in a lifetime.

I told Latey I had offered my services, and he was highly indignant. He said he had been at very great pains to find the right man to assist him ; that I appeared to be the right man ; that there were plenty of young fellows with no job who would be only too delighted to get out to South Africa, and that if I deserted him in his hour of need he would not consider it necessary to hold the job open for me till I came back.

It was the only shadow that ever came between us. As it happened, my friend wrote back to say that only twenty men had been selected from the 'Varsity Corps to go out, and that I was not one of them. So the cloud passed away, and we settled down to our pictures of soldiers and sailors and big guns and Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener and Ladysmith and caricatures of Kruger. What an interminable time it seemed !

But Latey kept us in heart. He was very fond of a little dinner after the work of the day was done, and two or three times a week he would appear in our office about six o'clock, making it seem smaller than ever.

" May I have the honour and the pleasure of the company of my editorial staff at dinner this evening ? I propose to reserve a table at the Cafe d'Italie, if that will be agreeable to you ? "

We said it would, and shortly afterwards we would all sally out, the company often being reinforced by a

friend of Latey's, Mr. T. A. Bullock, of the Eastern Cable Company. We would go across the Strand to Short's, and there Latey would advise me to partake of a glass of vermouth, "to give tone to the stomach." Having duly toned up the stomach, Latey would wave his umbrella at a passing hansom, and off we would bowl to Soho, where a table had been reserved, and where the manager of the restaurant met us on the doorstep, and ushered and bowed us through the crowded dining-room, sweeping the waiters aside with ecstatic exclamations.

After dinner there would usually be speeches, for Bullock was a great orator, and Latey himself liked a few words with each toast. The speeches, naturally, had to be delivered in an undertone; but they were none the less impassioned for that. I never made one myself, but I can remember Eden waxing extremely eloquent when declaring his fidelity to the chief. And he was perfectly sincere.

At other times Latey would ask me to accompany him to the various banquets for which he had received invitations as editor of two important papers. We would usually be given places of honour, Latey being very well known to everybody, and thus I came into contact with all sorts of people whose names had been familiar to me all my life. Latey never forgot to introduce me to these eminent ones, and his introduction always took the same form. "Allow me to present Mr. Keble Bell, who does me the honour to assist me in editing the *Sketch*." I fear I was dreadfully embarrassed, but the chief was doing his utmost to push me on in the world.

A weekly illustrated paper looks simple enough by

the time it reaches the public, but a vast amount of work is involved in its production. Perhaps some of my readers would like to know what happens behind the scenes.

We used to divide our paper into four sheets—A, B, C, and D. We would start on a Monday morning with D sheet, which consisted of, say, eight pages. This sheet formed the centre of the paper, and had to be completed and got rid of by the Wednesday before publication. It is obvious, therefore, that the centre sheet could not be topical save by intelligent anticipation.

Full-page portraits, full-page drawings, and illustrated articles filled up our D sheet, this matter having been in preparation for weeks beforehand. C was much the same, although C sheet would include the short story, and the regular literary features, such as the "Literary Lounger," in those days signed "O. O." and written by the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll. D and C sheets went to press together.

One word about the matter contained in these sheets. It sounds simple enough to get a few large photographs and a few drawings and bung them into the paper. But these photographs and drawings had to be selected from thousands submitted. When I say thousands, I mean thousands. I am sure that fully two thousand photographs would come to the office in each week, and all had to be carefully considered in case a plum should be overlooked.

B sheet had to go to press on the Friday before publication. (Most people know, I think, that the *Sketch* is nominally published on Wednesday, but is obtainable in London on Tuesday evening). B sheet

consisted of sixteen pages, eight of which were devoted to a feature called, simply, "Small Talk." This feature contained notes on everything under the sun not dealt with in other parts of the paper. We had our military correspondent, our naval correspondent, legal, ecclesiastical, art, social, and so forth. And the pages were peppered with portraits, menus, thumb-nail sketches, and all sorts of things.

"Small Talk" was an excellent miscellany, but I always thought it too long. In later years it was much reduced, and now has disappeared.

A, the final sheet, went to press on Monday at midday. This just gave a chance to include some important happening over the week-end. A included, of course, the front page, and we always paid great attention to our front page, which was displayed on the bookstalls all over the kingdom. It was no uncommon thing for the front page to be changed five or six times before the paper ultimately got to bed.

Latey and myself used to make up each of these sections together. I would take all the material into his room, and he would look it through, and decide what was to go in. Sometimes we had little arguments, for attempts were naturally made to impose on Latey's good nature. Ladies would call on him and talk to him for an hour about some lovely and gifted girl who only needed a portrait and a paragraph in the *Sketch* to spring straightway into fame. She usually played the violin; and the mother was armed with suitable pictures of the young woman and her violin.

After the lady's departure, Latey would send for me and hand me the photograph of the young woman, and some matter for a paragraph.

"Please have a small block made of this and see that it goes into our next issue."

"Very good, sir. But may I remind you that we have portraits of one hundred and forty-five talented violinists awaiting publication?"

"That may be, but I have *promised* to help this young lady."

I would then shove the picture into a pigeon-hole until the fond mother began to write in and ask when the portrait would appear. All this may sound very heartless on my part, but the dear old man could refuse nobody who told the tale sufficiently well, and the size of the paper to him was boundless. I know I must have earned the hatred of thousands of talented violinists, singers, reciters, actresses, pianists, harpists, 'cellists, and performers on the ocarina. Perhaps they hate me still. It's all in the day's work to be hated by people who have nothing better to do with their vital forces.

SAVAGE CLUB.

House Dinner, February 11th, 1911.



J. KEBLE BELL
IN THE CHAIR

Drawn by the late Tom Browne, R.I.

CHAPTER IX

THE SAVAGE CLUB

IN February, 1900, about seven months after I had been appointed to the assistant-editorship of the *Sketch*, I was elected a member of the Savage Club, at that time easily the most interesting club in London. It may still be so for anything I know to the contrary, but unfortunately I resigned my membership in 1916 as a War sacrifice, and have always been too shy to rejoin. And too sentimental, as well, for I know that I should miss many faces once familiar.

Much has been written about the Savage Club, but never quite from my own point of view. Everybody knows that the Saturday night house dinners are a great feature, and that distinguished men from all over the world have been entertained at them. But the Saturday dinners do not represent the real spirit of the club. The Savages are not at their best when on show, and many habitual frequenters of the club used to think these dinners rather a bore. New members adored them, and quite rightly, because the atmosphere was unique and most of the turns new to them. After a time, however, they looked forward to the more intimate entertainment which would come along more or less spontaneously after the visitors and punctilious married members had caught their trains back to the domestic hearth.

These irresponsible parties were sometimes very brilliant. Men who had done their work at the theatre would drop into the club for supper, and somewhere round twelve o'clock we would get the piano going. That would bring them into the big room from the supper-room and the bar, and they would find an informal audience ready to give them a hearing such as they could get nowhere else in London.

I remember once Arthur Roberts suddenly appearing in the club. He was a member, but never used the club very much. The Eccentric was his home. Still, here he was, and the fancy seized him to give us a burlesque, quite impromptu, of grand opera. He found a foil in Cheesewright, and one of our pianists—probably Jack Ivimey—took charge of the music.

These three kept it up for a full hour. Roberts was in amazing form. They never sang one intelligible word, and yet it sounded exactly like grand opera. Both men were as serious as death, and the pianist improvised like a genius inspired. I shall never forget the way Arthur Roberts worked that night—far harder than he ever needed to work on the stage.

When it was all over, he put on his hat and walked out of the club, and I never saw him there again.

Courtice Pounds was a great favourite at these Saturday night second houses. He usually brought Harold Samuel in with him, and Harold could play accompaniments just as well when he was unknown as he can now that he is famous. Charlie Pounds would lean up against the piano, and we were all spellbound as he sang, in that exquisitely gentle voice, such things as, "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes"—

which Sullivan wrote specially for him—"Araby," and Walter Hedgcock's setting of "Mandalay."

Harry Fragson loved these inconsequential evenings. I remember going into the club one night when the weather was very sultry. For some unknown reason, a huge fire blazed in the big room. Harold Samuel was there alone, and presently Fragson dropped in.

The humour seized us to have a supper-table placed close to this huge fire. (The waiters were never surprised at anything we did). So close was the table placed that two of the legs were actually in the fender.

Fragson, Harold, and myself sat down at the table, and studiously took no notice of anybody who came into the room. We were deep in conversation—also inconsequential—and oblivious of the fact that anything out of the ordinary was happening.

We ordered grilled bloaters and champagne.

"A bottle?" asked the waiter.

"Bring a small magnum," said Fragson.

A magnum of perfect wine was brought.

"Put it down by the fire," said Fragson.

The waiter placed the magnum in the fender, and we went on with our conversation. I must tell you that Fragson had invented his own style of conversation, which he taught to me. It needed a fairly nimble wit. You had to appear to be deeply interested, but not one sentence had the slightest connection with the next. For example:

"I think I saw you in Trafalgar Square this morning."

"Yes, but the best kind come from Dundee."

"Ah! Then he *wasn't* the man who actually did the murder?"

"Not if you change at Earl's Court."

Old members, not quite understanding the idea, would stand and listen for a long while, and finally leave us in despair of understanding a single word. One dear old thing got a terrible fright. He stood by us for about ten minutes, watching our serious faces, and listening to our convincing tones and presuasive arguments. At last he tottered away and said to a friend :

"I really believe I'm going mad. I've been listening to those two chaps for the last ten minutes, and I haven't understood a *single word* they said! I think I'll take a cab and go home."

Well, this was the kind of insane conversation that was going forward at that supper-party in front of the huge fire ; whilst the champagne got hotter and hotter, and the bloaters sizzled on the dish, and the perspiration, of which we took not the slightest notice, streamed down our faces. The only intelligible remark Fragson made was to instruct the waiter to put more coal on the fire, which was duly done. Of course it all ended in a little fun.

Fragson had peculiar ideas of humour, some of which were rather cruel. I remember that he was once talking earnestly—and sensibly—with an old member who had a very gaping breast-pocket in his coat. All the time he was talking, Fragson was carefully pouring his whisky-and-soda into this tempting pocket. The old gentleman's language when he discovered the liquid running down his trouser-leg was too awful to be recorded.

One of Fragson's heroes in real life was Little Tich. Like all Parisians, he had fallen a victim to Tich's act with his big boots. He used to say to me, quite suddenly, "Be Tich." He would then take hold of my coat at the back, and I would lean forward, quite straight and with both feet together, until I was nearly touching the ground. This was all very well in the club, but Fragson would exclaim "Be Tich!" when we were walking down the Strand, and the performance caused considerable consternation among the passing foot-passengers.

Which of us dreamt in those merry days that the comedian would shortly meet his death in the most tragic manner possible? He was shot in Paris by his old father, who *was* insane.

Fragson always played his part at the Saturday night after-shows, but seldom performed at the set concert. For one thing, he was usually working two or three music-halls, and earning two hundred pounds a week.

One night, when we were short of musicians, it suddenly occurred to me to start a game of "musical chairs." I have never yet known any person who could resist the lure of this game, and the Savages were just the people to play it well.

I got the waiters to clear away all the tables and place a long row of chairs all down the room. Then I persuaded Herman Finck and Harold Samuel to play an extempore duet, and called for candidates to fill the chairs.

The thing was a huge success, and very funny. All types were represented. I have seen Nicol Dunn, editor then of the *Morning Post*, E. J. Odell, the veteran

actor with the long white beard, Mostyn Pigott, the fiery-haired light poet with the huge moustache, Robb Harwood, the tall, gaunt interpreter of Captain Hook, Courtice Pounds, round and smiling, Fred Grundy, the journalist with the fixed monocle—all these and many others I have seen gravely and anxiously circling round and round the long line of chairs, whilst Harold Samuel and Finck poured forth an intermittent stream of deliciously comic and exhilarating music.

The thing became an institution. Men would drop in from other clubs to play musical chairs in the early hours of Sunday morning at the Savage Club. An innocent recreation enough for people who had done everything else there was to do under the sun !

Moreover, the fame of it spread. I remember a certain rather impertinent young photographer calling at the office one morning in the endeavour to obtain commissions. As it happened I was very full up with material, and returned a cold negative to all his suggestions.

“ You don’t fancy any of them ? ” he said at last.

“ I’m afraid not.”

“ Oh, well, how about musical chairs at the Savage Club ? ”

He was certainly not a member of the club, nor had I ever seen him inside the building, either on Saturday or any other night.

By way of variation, we introduced athletic sports. These consisted, for the most part, of standing jumps, long jumps, and high jumps. We would place two ordinary chairs back to back, about a yard apart, and lay a walking-stick across the tops. The feat lay in

clearing the walking-stick whilst keeping both feet close together. I became quite expert at this and could do it with comparative ease.

For the long jump we drew a chalk line on the floor as the taking-off mark, and each member's jump had his initials marked against it on the linoleum. A very excellent way of passing the time, but the jumping was somewhat marred by the fact that Mostyn Pigott *would* persist in pinching the competitors from behind just as they were about to leap. Some of the more eminent were quite cross about it.

The qualification for the club was very strict. It was absolutely essential that every candidate should be *professionally* connected with one of the following five callings: Science, Music, Literature, Art, or Drama. Amateurs had little chance of getting in, though many tried. Not only was each candidate duly proposed and seconded, and his name placed in a book so that his supporters might sign for him, but there was also a qualification committee, which went deeply into the social and professional history of every man up for election. Even then we were not satisfied. Every candidate was put up for a month on probation, and during this probationary period he was expected to visit the club not less than three times in order that the members might get to know him. It can be easily imagined that any man finally elected set much store by the privilege.

Once he was elected and approved, a great deal of latitude was allowed. But the limit was almost reached by a young actor, now dead, who actually took a very well-known musical, comedy actress right into the smoking-room one night, where no female had ever

been before. It was rumoured that the lady sat on Odell's knee, but I never believed that.

The name of Ned Cleary keeps cropping up in books of reminiscences, but not all the writers knew Cleary so intimately as I did. I was with him a great deal in Paris, and he used to come and spend the weekend at my house at Merstham.

Cleary was one of the most extraordinary men who ever drew breath. His ideas were as big as the Atlantic Ocean, and he could expound them in language which beggared Shakespeare and left the Old Testament standing still. When he was talking—and he never stopped talking—his eyes used to blaze with the fervour of a fanatic, and his gestures took in the whole world and the universe beyond.

He was always just on the edge of making a fortune, and always failed through having overlooked some vital point which any wise and cautious person would have investigated before taking a single step.

He conceived, for example, the very admirable notion of playing professional football by night, when all the football devotees would be free to watch the games, and would do so in warmth and comfort. A most excellent scheme, and Cleary saw within his grasp one of the greatest fortunes ever amassed by an *entrepreneur*.

Without an instant's delay, he got a lease of Olympia, fitted huge arc lamps in the roof, and had a green carpet made as big as a football field. This is not an exaggeration. I often saw him driving about this "field" in his motor-car.

He then invited the League teams to fix up their matches by night. And here came the snag—the

inevitable snag on which all his ships foundered. He had omitted to ask the League if they had any objection to these games being played at night. As it happened, they had, the strongest possible objection. No football was played at all, and there was poor old Cleary with Olympia and his grass carpet on his hands, and the building empty. He filed his petition and began to think out something else.

Paulhan flew the Channel. That excited Cleary. Here was a fortune asking to be picked up. He would take Paulhan to America and show off the most famous flying-man in the world. I was in Paris at the time, and saw the inside and the outside of the whole thing.

Paulhan and several other French aviators were to open at San Francisco under the aegis of the Hearst Press. Cleary would then take over, so to speak, and tour Paulhan and Co. through the United States. Paulhan was to have five thousand pounds before leaving France, and a further five thousand on landing in America. Cleary was to pay the first five thousand, and he did so. Naturally, it was a bit of an effort to raise so large a sum, but he did raise it. All his eggs were in this basket.

Before the party sailed for America, Cleary must needs give a monster banquet in Paulhan's honour. It was held at the Hotel Mirabeau, and I had the honour of being present.

Cleary had invited representatives of the French, English, and American Press. He received them all personally, making speeches now in French and then in English or American. I never saw a man in such

tremendous form. He could have taken the world in his arms that night and squeezed the life out of it.

One of the guests was Paulhan's old father, who sat next his son. Cleary made a wonderful speech, every word of which had to be translated to the old man as it went on. The gravity of their faces was astonishing as Cleary outlined the future of the universe after he had done with it.

At last they sailed. On landing at New York, Cleary was presented with an injunction on behalf of the Wright Brothers. They claimed that Paulhan's machines infringed their patents, and the only portion of America over which they would permit him to fly was San Francisco !

Cleary's five thousand was gone ; and to that had to be added, I suppose, the cost of the banquet and transportation. Unless the Hearst Press paid for those.

But Cleary never would listen to reason. Whilst he was conducting his negotiations in Paris, I suggested to him that something of this sort might happen. But he waved me aside.

“ My boy,” he orated in his large way, “ I’m not going to depend on aviators ! Don’t you think it ! I’m going to have elephants, camels, lions, dromedaries, zebras, unicorns, and every lovely animal Nature ever created ! ”

The last thing he did was to invent a lamp. One of its qualities was that you could drop it on the floor or throw it at a man’s head and it wouldn’t burst or catch fire. A friend of mine and his, an artist, said to Cleary :

“ Cleary, do you think I might have one of your lamps ? ”

"*Have* one?" cried Cleary, gripping the artist by the hand with the strength of a Polar bear. "*Have* one? My boy, you shall have one wrought out of gold, encrusted with amethyst, and fringed around its belly with lapis-lazuli!"

Nobody ever mentions the Savage Club without telling all the old stories about Odell. Odell now resides in the Charterhouse, for which he was nominated by no less a person than King Edward VII. In company with the late Douglas Almond, R.I., I once paid a visit to Odell at the Charterhouse, a place I had long wanted to see.

We began by knocking at the wrong door, which was opened by an old gentleman exactly like Colonel Newcome. With a magnificent sweep of the hand, he referred us to the door opposite.

Odell was dozing on his bed, but he at once got up and acted as our guide. A more entertaining guide it would be impossible to imagine. He was in great form that afternoon, and his exposition of the history and inner life of the Charterhouse will always live in my memory.

He finished up outside a very gracious residence near the entrance.

"And *that*," he said, "is the Master's house. Very well, then. Don't stare rudely at it."

After which he led us, by steps so gentle as to be almost imperceptible, to the Charterhouse Hotel.

In my early days of membership of the Savage we had as steward an ex-sergeant from the army. He was an Irishman, and rather peculiar in his habits. I remember once sending away some dish on the grounds that it was not fit for consumption. Flanagan

brought it back, put it down in front of me, placed his hands on his knees—a very favourite attitude when he wished to be persuasive—and assured me in silken tones that if I didn't eat it I should be reported to the committee !

He finished up—not on this occasion but later—by cutting off his own head with a butcher's knife. Those were brave days. The present generation have no conception of the m.p.h.

But, after all, the best thing about the Savage Club was the good-fellowship and the varied types of character. Being drawn from five professions, you had men from five different worlds. Here was a man who had built railways in wildest Africa, and here another who had performed conjuring tricks at Windsor by special command. We had men who could make a brilliant caricature on a shirt-front in three minutes, and men who swayed the destinies of the nation from Fleet Street.

You could not be bored in such company. It was a wonderful education for a young writer just arrived in London—far more valuable than any University in the world could furnish forth.

I remember once at luncheon seeing five of my friends round a small table.

“ Five editors at one table,” I commented.

“ Come and make a sixth,” they shouted.

But I declined. I was afraid of five editors all in bunch.

We never minced our words in the club, all the same. We said things that we should never have said outside, quite sure that our confidence would be respected.

A man could come in there and throw his cares and his dignity to the winds. He could forget himself and his outside troubles in listening to the best music or the best stories. The variety was infinite. I made friendships in that dear old club that lasted to the end, and many, I am thankful to say, that still last.

A real friend is always with you, whether you see him or not. The friends I made at the Savage often visit me at my home, but whether they come in the flesh or not they are always there. I can see them, and I can hear their voices. If I am in a difficulty, I know what they would advise, and I consult my invisible guests more often than they suspect. And their advice is invariably good.

Even those who are gone are vivid to those who are left. We talk about them when we meet, and we always laugh. Not one of them but we can remember a hundred tales about him, and conjure up the scenes in which he figured. Tragedy overtook many of them, but in their lives they were gay and delightful companions.

It would be useless to endeavour to recapture such days and nights as we had. They are memories—delightful memories—and an “encore” would be a grievous mistake.

CHAPTER X

I BECOME AN AUTHOR

WHEN, as a boy, I used to conjure up visions of the future, I never saw myself as an author. I sometimes wanted to be a journalist, and I always longed to be an actor ; but I never hankered after the life of an author. And yet I have published, up-to-date, over forty books, not counting published plays.

And this is the way it happened. I have recorded the fact that Latey, when I first joined him on the *Sketch*, encouraged me to write all sorts of things for the paper. I had always wished to have a page of my own in some publication, and this seemed the chance to realise the ambition. So I suggested to Latey that I should establish a weekly feature in the *Sketch*, and that it should be illustrated by a well-known black-and white artist.

Latey consented, and “The Social Jester” came into being, with small illustrations by the late Tom Browne, R.I. One morning I received a letter, addressed to me as “Chicot,” the *nom-de-plume* for this feature selected by Latey. The writer of the letter was connected with a very famous publishing house, and he was good enough to say that he liked my “Social Jester” articles very much, and predicted a success for them if published in book form.

I naturally replied that I should be very pleased to



A SNAPSHOT AT LAND'S END

Making Notes for "The Fast Lady"

consider any offer he cared to make, but he pointed out that his firm did not issue new books, and mentioned the name of Mr. Grant Richards as the publisher most likely to do well with my book.

Mr. Grant Richards at that time had not been very long on his own as a publisher, but his dashing methods were causing a great stir in the publishing world. I sent him a selection of the articles, and he replied by asking me to call upon him.

He was very young, very well-groomed, very alert, and never seen without a monocle. He was a nephew of the late Grant Allen.

“I’m not going to publish your articles,” he said, “but I’ll tell you what I will do. You sit down and write a long humorous book, and I’ll publish it and make you as big a man as Jerome K. Jerome.”

I flatly declined the offer. I told him I had given considerable thought to the matter, and I had no desire to come before the public as a humorous writer. I reminded him that once a humorist always a humorist, and that the public would never allow a man who had once amused them to do anything else. I had read the lamentations of humorous authors, and taken them to heart.

This was not to be the end of the matter, however. Grant Richards was not a man easily baulked. He wanted a humorous book that might be a big success.

In the meantime, I wrote to Mr. Arrowsmith of Bristol. Mr. Arrowsmith was unique in the publishing world. He had a little office on the quayside, and personally read all the manuscripts that came to the office. He was a printer as well as a publisher, and did not bother to publish all the year round. He just

waited until something came his way that seemed likely to hit the taste of the public, and then he published it. Not very much money was spent in advertising the book. It had to sink or swim according to its merits and the taste of the public.

How accurately he gauged this taste may be judged from the fact that he published from his little office on the quayside at Bristol such huge successes as "Called Back," "Three Men in a Boat," and "The Prisoner of Zenda."

Some years later I happened to be in Bristol and called upon the old gentleman. Speaking of "Three Men in a Boat," he said :

"I pay Jerome so much in royalties every year. I can't imagine what becomes of all the copies of that book I issue. I often think the public must eat them."

He then took from his shelves a bound manuscript. It really was a manuscript—not a typewritten affair, but every word most carefully written by the hand of the author, with not a single erasion or correction.

"This," he said, "is the original copy of 'The Prisoner of Zenda' as sent to me by Anthony Hope. You will see how carefully and patiently he works—no dashing his story off and then hurling it at a typist, but every word copied out in his own hand."

It was certainly a marvellous manuscript, and Arrowsmith did well to treasure it.

Mr. Arrowsmith replied to my letter by asking me to send him the articles for his consideration. A little later came a letter offering to publish the book at the price of one shilling, with the original illustrations by Tom Browne, and a cover-design by the same artist. My royalty was to be twopence a copy

on all copies sold, thirteen to count as twelve. And I was to have ten pounds in advance of royalties.

I accepted the offer with alacrity, and thus my first book came into being. The design that Browne drew for the cover is before me as I write ; it was one of his happiest efforts. He was rather annoyed, though, at having to include in it a couple of unicorns sitting on their haunches on either side of a full-rigged sailing-ship. But this was the trade-mark of the firm of Arrowsmith, and the old gentleman would have it on all his covers, and Browne had to put it in.

So there I sat one morning, with the complimentary copies on my table. I was an author. I had written a book, and it had been printed, and bound, and somebody had published it. True, it was only a shilling book, and the articles had all appeared in the *Sketch*, but it *was* a book, and it had my name on the cover. A strange sensation. I have never experienced it since.

Several people said nice things about the little book, and Mr. Eveleigh Nash, now a well-known publisher but at that time a literary agent, asked me if I had anything he could offer to a London publisher. I had, of course, more of my “Social Jester” articles, and these were, in due course, published by Mr. John Long, this time with cloth covers and at the price of three-and-sixpence. So now I had two books to my credit—or discredit, just as you please. I did my best and time will decide.

The next event in the publishing line was a letter from Mr. Grant Richards asking me to lunch with him at the Carlton Hotel. The Carlton Hotel, if you please ! I had never been inside the Carlton. He added

that he had a suggestion to make which he thought would interest me.

I went. Two of the most magnificent footmen I had ever seen in my life took my hat and stick—one article, one footman. A third then escorted me into the presence of the publisher, who had with him the very gentleman who had made the original suggestion that I should publish my articles in book-form.

The first thing we had to eat was snails in their shells. I was horrified. At first I was incredulous, but when I saw Richards extract a snail from its shell with a fork specially made for the purpose, I knew that this was no joke. I was expected to eat my portion.

“Never had them before?” he asked, wolfing a second.

“Never.”

“They’re delicious! You try ‘em!”

So I bravely dug the slender fork into the shell, scooped out a snail, hesitated, and then put the thing in my mouth. It was lukewarm! How I swallowed it I know not, but I did, and immediately felt slightly sick. The third gentleman was getting on a little better, but I had an idea he was only consuming the things out of bravado.

“Well?” said Richards.

“Filthy!” I decided.

“You don’t like ‘em?”

“I think it’s the most loathsome food I ever tasted!”

“All right. You hand me over your share. I love ‘em!”

And he devoured mine as well as his own, and even drank the syrup that remained in the shell. A very precocious young man, I thought.

The rest of the lunch was excellent, I expect, but I remember nothing about it. After the years of boyhood, when one could eat the world and look round for more, I never took much interest in food. All dinner-parties and banquets are thrown away on me, save for the wines and the cigar. I like very plain food, the best of its kind, and perfectly cooked. Even then I want very little of it, and am always rather relieved when any meal is over.

We retired to the lounge for coffee, and there, seizing an interval when the band was not playing, Richards unfolded his scheme. He wanted me to write a humorous book and sell it to him outright. He was also to have an option on the two following books at advanced prices. The book in question would be boomed as no book had ever been boomed before in this country. He would have sandwichmen all over London, a huge advertisement on the front page of the *Daily Mail*, and masses of the book on all the bookstalls.

“ You will be a made man,” he declared.

It was rather a dazzling offer to have put before one at the age of twenty-six or so. When I repeated that I did not wish to come before the public as a humorous author, he cleverly reminded me that Charles Dickens made his name with the “ *Pickwick Papers*,” and did a lot of serious work in spite of it.

We then talked terms. I demanded two hundred and fifty pounds for the first book, which was pretty daring, seeing that I had made only ten pounds out of “ *The Chicot Papers* ” and twelve pounds out of “ *Letters to Dolly*. ” But lunching at the Carlton had enlarged my ideas.

Like a good business man, Richards beat me down a little ; but even then the sum was a stimulating one for a quite unknown young man. And so I set to work to write "Love and a Cottage," which has passed through many hands and many editions. When Richards had done with it the firm of Newnes brought out an edition, and the latest I saw on the stalls was issued by the firm of Simpkin Marshall. From all of these, of course, I derived no royalties, having sold the book outright.

My method of writing this book was, I think, a little out of the ordinary. One night, just before I began the work, I met an American writer at the Savage Club to whom I confided that writing—the actual labour of wielding the pen—was to me an agony. I told him that when I had been writing a few hundred words I would get into such a condition of nerves that I had to throw down my pen and stamp up and down the room. That was perfectly true, and remains true to this day. I fancy it must be a legacy from my arduous nights with the stylus at the Press Association.

"Oh," says he, "you can easily get over that. Buy a typewriter, and do your writing direct on to the machine. You will find your work a pleasure ; you will be able to write more at a sitting, you will save typewriters' bills, and when you want to refer back you won't have to wade through pages of your own handwriting. But there's one danger. You may be tempted to write too much. I mean, you may become diffuse. Guard against that."

I bought a typewriter the next day, and the same evening I began to write "Love and a Cottage" on

it. The work was slow at first, because I knew not the first thing about typing, and was always forgetting to shift the carrier, or whatever they call it, with the result that I wrote two lines on the top of each other. But I stuck to it, and by the time the book was half finished I was a pretty expert typist. But I never told Grant Richards, until this moment, that I learnt to type in his interests.

The machine I bought was an American make, and had its own keyboard. The consequence is that I have used that type of machine ever since. I forget how many I have worn out, but with forty books, twenty plays, short stories, dialogues, and innumerable articles I must have written millions of words on that machine. For the *Sketch* alone, in twenty-eight years, I have written nearly two million words. For three years I wrote three thousand five hundred words every week for that journal.

Well, "Love and a Cottage" was eventually finished—it had to be done at night after my day at the *Sketch* office—and handed over to John Hassall to be illustrated. Hassall also did a coloured poster for the sandwichmen, and I shall never forget my sensations when I met about a hundred of these gentlemen coming down Regent Street, each gentleman bearing our poster on his head, on his front, and on his back. I think I ran into Swan and Edgar's and hid under the counter.

Richards also took a huge space on the front page of the *Daily Mail*, right in the middle. I should say it was about a foot square, and must have cost a small fortune. As for the bookstalls, I saw one pile of copies at Paddington which reached from the counter to the

roof of the stall. Nobody could have missed hearing about the book, even though they omitted to buy it.

The reviewers were very kindly, as most of them have always been to me, and Robertson Nicoll promptly commissioned a ten thousand word story for his magazine, *The Woman at Home*.

Thus I was launched as a humorous writer, and never since that date have I dared to publish a tragedy. It takes a long time to write a book, and one cannot afford to spend even six months over a piece of work that no publisher will accept when it is completed. My books have always been bought before they were written, but I doubt if that would have been the case had I taken to tragedy. So the young man refusing lukewarm snails at the Carlton was right.

CHAPTER XI

EDITING THE “SKETCH”

MOST people know the story of the weary, emaciated little man who consulted a London nerve specialist.

“I am the victim of melancholy,” he said. “All the world seems to laugh except myself.”

“Oh,” returned the cheery specialist, “you want cheering up. You go and see Grimaldi! *He'll* make you laugh!”

“I *am* Grimaldi,” replied the sad little man.

And yet there are still, I suppose, many people who imagine that a man who makes people laugh as his profession, or who tries to make them laugh, is himself the happiest being under the sun, devoid of care, full of quip and merriment from day's end to day's end. They ought to see Mr. George Robey on his way to the theatre. No learned judge entering the Law Courts could look more conscious of his responsibilities.

Up to the moment in my life at which I have now arrived, I had known, at times, unhappiness, and heart-ache, and disappointment. But I had not as yet come face to face with tragedy. I was now to meet that grim spectre, and even to become on nodding terms with him.

One evening, just as I was walking up Milford Lane

at the end of the day's labours, I met our advertisement-manager. He stopped me and said :

“ Have you heard about John ?” (Among ourselves we affectionately called John Latey “ John.”)

“ What about him ?” I replied.

“ Haven't you noticed anything the matter with him ?”

“ No.”

“ Well, he's got to go into hospital for examination, and I think it will mean an operation.”

“ Poor old chap !” said I, deeply grieved. He seemed old to me although he was only about sixty. “ Is it very serious ?”

“ I doubt if you will ever see him back at this office.”

This was my first acquaintance with tragedy. It was a tragedy that that robust, kindly, genial man should be stricken down at the moment when he was beginning to reap the fruits of his forty years of toil. I went home that evening in a very sad frame of mind.

A few days later my friend and chief had vanished from the office, and I was left to fill his chair as well as I could. It was a big responsibility for a young man of six-and-twenty, for the *Sketch* was even then, as it is now, a paper famous the world over. It was to be found in every club all round the world where the English language was spoken. It earned a handsome revenue each year, gave employment to numbers of people, and the editor was responsible for the distribution of much money. There were also such things as libel actions and infringements of copyright to be considered, and doubtless there were those

outside who would welcome any serious slip in the control of the paper.

Still, I was called upon to take up the task, and I took it up with all the energy at my command. It was hard work. Nobody was appointed to my late position, nor did I ask for such assistance. I fear I have always been rather an independent sort of person—I have mentioned that the motto of my family is "Independent in action as in mind"—and I felt that I could work better untrammelled by the suggestions and ideas of a subordinate.

It was my desire, of course, to follow along the lines laid down by Latey, for I realised that I was merely a *locum tenens*, and that, if all went as we hoped, he would eventually return to the editorial chair. But little alterations doubtless crept into the paper. In such a journal as the *Sketch*, individuality cannot be entirely suppressed.

And so for many months I carried on—I cannot remember at this date for how many—until one day Latey did return. The change in him was distressing, and I do not propose to dwell upon it. Only a man with the courage of a lion would have returned at all. But he took up his duties again just where he had laid them down, and we all tried to pretend that everything was as it had been before his illness. It was a distressing time, and I would not go through it again for any earthly reward there may be to win. At last he left us again, and this time for ever.

He was a great loss, and I have never ceased to express my gratitude for all he did for me. If there is nothing else worthy of preservation in these pages, I hope that the lines in which I have tried to pay a tribute

to the memory of John Latey may endure for a while.

We laid the poor old boy to rest, and I continued to get out the paper each week, and tried to keep it light and frivolous and jocund. No appointment to the editorship was made for some little time, though I often met people interested in journalism who informed me that So-and-so had "just been appointed" to the editorship of the *Sketch*.

And then one day I was summoned to the board room, and the directors announced that they were prepared to appoint me Editor at a certain salary, and also handed me a cheque for the extra work which had been thrown on my shoulders during Latey's long illness.

Thus I became at twenty-seven a full-blown editor.

My first endeavour was to get more drawings into the paper and less photographs. This policy may or may not have been the correct one, but the paper certainly did not suffer in circulation, and there was less danger of clashing with other journals of a similar kind. It may also be explained that a drawing is easier to reproduce than a photograph, and I was always trying to turn out a well-printed paper. Paper itself was not so superfine in quality in those days as it has since become.

I gradually collected round me a large number of artists, among whom I may name the following : Phil May, Max Beerbohm, Dudley Hardy, Gunning King, Cecil Aldin, Ralph Cleaver, Tom Browne, John Hassall, Lance Thackeray, Louis Wain, Frank Reynolds, Lewis Baumer, G. L. Stampa, Thomas

Downey, and Douglas Almond. There were others, of course, but these well-known names will indicate the kind of work we offered the public.

The regular features were written by Sir William Robertson Nicoll, Sir John Foster Fraser, Adrian Ross, Vernon Blackburn, Colonel Newnham-Davis, E. F. Spence, John N. Raphael, Chance Newton, John Hollingshead, and myself.

Phil May's return to the fold was only temporary. I was leaving the office one evening when a man passed me with an artist's portfolio under his arm. I had never met him before, but I recognised Phil May. And it looked to me as though he were on his way to see the editor of the *Sketch*. So the editor of the *Sketch* darted back to his room by another entrance and was ready to receive the great genius of black-and-white when his name was announced.

"Good evening," said Phil, with his usual cheery smile. "I've brought you a drawing."

He took it out of the portfolio and handed it to me. It was a very slight thing—a caricature of George Robey as the prehistoric man—but exquisitely done, which goes without saying.

"You are offering me this for the *Sketch*?"

This may sound a foolish question, but I knew Phil May was on the staff of *Punch*, and *Punch* men are not, as a rule, allowed to work for any other weekly paper. Still, it was not my business to know the ins and outs of Phil May's contract, or to cross-examine him about it.

"Yes, if you care to publish it."

"I should certainly like to publish it. How much?"

"Oh, the old price, I suppose."

“What was that?”

He told me. It was the same price that I paid to all our leading artists.

“But I’d like it now,” he added.

The cashier had not left the building, so I sent in to him for the money. While we were waiting for it, I got an idea.

“You’re interested in Shakespeare, aren’t you?” I said. As a matter of fact, it had been well rumoured that Phil was about to desert art for the stage, and would shortly appear in one of Shakespeare’s plays. Some time later, he did actually play Pistol or Nym, but, I believe, for one performance only.

“Very,” was the answer.

“Well, why not do me some illustrations of Shakespeare from your own point of view? I mean, take a well-known line from Shakespeare, and make a comic drawing to it. I’ll run a series and call it ‘Shakespeare Illustrated by Phil May’.”

He jumped at it. For one thing, it saved him the bother of getting hold of a joke each week—the greatest bugbear to the humorous artist. Apart from which the idea was quite a sound one.

He went off with his money, being met at the top of Milford Lane by a nice little group of friends. In due course we started our series.

When it had been running merrily for a few weeks, I got a letter from Sir Francis Burnand, then editor of *Punch*, in which he pointed out that nobody wished to injure dear old Phil May, but that his contract with *Punch* prohibited his working for any other weekly paper. He went on to say that his firm would gladly take over any drawings we had in stock, at the price

we had paid for them, and any blocks that had been already made.

There was no help for it. The drawings and the blocks had to be surrendered, for Phil's sake, and my series was transferred to the pages of *Punch*. But I could not resist having a little dig at Burnand.

"It is all very well," I wrote to him, "to take over the drawings, but what about the idea, which was mine?"

He replied, "What is past praying for is not past paying for. How much?"

To which I answered, "The honour of contributing to *Punch*, even indirectly, is quite sufficient reward for me." And thus the episode ended. I may add that I have never contributed directly to *Punch*, but on more than one occasion I have done so indirectly, by giving jokes to my artist-friends on that journal.

Since we are talking of Phil May, perhaps the greatest humorous black-and-white artist the world has ever produced, here are one or two little stories about him which I hope are not too hackneyed.

One day, so runs the story, Phil was in bed, not feeling very well. His devoted wife wanted some money for delicacies, but Phil had to confess that he was temporarily short of cash, a thing that may happen at any time to any person of his temperament.

"Never mind," said the lady. "The *Graphic* owes you for that double page for the Christmas number. I'll jump on a 'bus, pop along to the office and draw the money."

This was extremely awkward for Phil, who had not only drawn the money for that drawing, but had also spent it—probably on a little group of friends.

The moment his wife had left the house, therefore, he jumped out of bed, put on a hat and overcoat, seized his stick, hailed a passing hansom, and got to the *Graphic* office long before the passenger by 'bus.

"Look here, old man," he said to the editor, "you know that double-page I did for the Christmas number?"

"Yes, Phil, but you've been paid for that."

"I know I have, but my wife doesn't know it, and she's coming along at once to collect the money. For God's sake give it her, and I'll do you another drawing for the money."

This was agreed and he hustled out and back to bed.

Shortly afterwards Mrs. May arrived at the *Graphic* office, and was shown into the editorial sanctum. She stated her business, and the money for the drawing was immediately paid over. Just as she was leaving, her eye fell on a walking-stick of peculiar design.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "How in the world did that get here?"

"That?" parried the editor. "That stick? Oh, I suppose some visitor must have left it."

"That stick belongs to Phil," was the answer. "There's not another like it in London. And less than an hour ago I saw it standing by his bedside!"

The game was up.

It is said that Phil May once went into the country, not far from London, to buy a horse. Having bought it, he was so pleased with the animal that he decided to ride it home.

On the way home, a storm of rain came on, and Phil found shelter for the horse and himself at a way-

side hostelry. As the rain still continued, he decided to leave the horse and get home by train. This he did, meaning to send for the horse next day. Unfortunately, he could not remember where he had left it.

Nor did he ever remember.

I like the one about the choice cigar. Dropping into Romano's one day, he met a friend who owed him some money over a small bet.

"Tell you what," said his friend. "I'll buy you the best cigar in the place."

Phil agreed and selected a cigar. Of course, in those days cigars were not the price they are now, but this one cost seven-and-six, for which you could get a little bit of real tobacco before the war.

Phil then strolled along to the stage-door of the old Strand Theatre, where he had a business appointment about a poster. While he was waiting for his name to be taken in to the manager, another friend rolled in.

"Hullo, Phil!"

"Hullo, old man!"

"Everything all right?"

"Splendid, thanks!"

"Well, then, don't waste your time on a cigar like that." And the weed was whisked out of Phil's mouth and pitched into the gutter. "Have one of mine instead."

Hassall was—and still is—another great character, and a man just as lovable as Phil May. He was also a lightning worker. I had an article about Kitchener which I wished to use in the next number, but it needed a bright illustration, so I sent it along to Hassall by special messenger, and asked him to let me

have a caricature of Kitchener as soon as possible. I then went out to my brief and frugal lunch. When I got back, the article and the caricature were lying on my desk. Hassall had kept the messenger-boy while he did the drawing.

We used to have great nights at the London Sketch Club, of which I was made an honorary member, to my great delight. The club in those days used to meet at Long's Hotel. One night there was a special supper-party, with Dudley Hardy in the chair.

At a certain moment in the evening, Hassall rose and begged leave to make a statement. He said that no man had worked harder for the club than Dudley Hardy—which was true—and that the members had decided to offer him a testimonial in recognition of these services. They hoped that he would always treasure it in memory of innumerable friends and innumerable merry evenings.

Two uniformed hotel porters then entered, bearing a handsome marble clock, which they placed in front of Dudley amid a hurricane of applause. The uniformed porters were Starr Wood and myself, and we had borrowed the clock from the mantelshelf in the hall.

Frank Reynolds, now art-editor of *Punch*, and famous for his Dickens illustrations and many other notable works, was introduced to me by Hassall as a young man who would go far. Reynolds' work was always a great joy to me, and lots of it will be found in the volumes of the *Sketch* of that period. He also illustrated three of my books—“The God in the Garden,” “Love in June,” and “The Smiths of Surbiton.”

Reynolds once came with me to my home at

Henley-in-Arden for a few days. After dinner one evening he told my father he would like to make a pencil sketch of him. The old gentleman consented, and we left them together.

Half-an-hour elapsed and then they joined us in the drawing-room. In that brief space Reynolds had achieved a masterly piece of work. But, to my amazement, the old gentleman didn't like it. I think perhaps he was tired at the time, and he thought Reynolds had made him look too severe.

"If you don't want it," I said, "may I have it?"

"Certainly," was the answer.

So I preserved it carefully, and ever since that time it has hung on the wall of my study, and is now reproduced in this volume. *Sketch p. 115*

I don't think any man could have crowded much more into his life than I did whilst editing the *Sketch*. My work at the office I have already described, but that was only a portion of my duties. It was necessary to keep in touch with the doings of the town, and it was especially necessary—at any rate, in my opinion—to see all the new plays produced, so that one might select the right photographs and the right number of them. All the photographs of every new play were brought to me first, and one had to select the best in about five minutes, and see that no other paper had anything too similar.

As I have said, we went to press on Monday at noon sharp. But important events often occurred in London on Saturday, such as the return of Lord Kitchener from South Africa, or the welcome home to the C.I.Vs. We were not a newspaper, I admit, but one did not like to produce a paper on a Wednesday containing

nothing about a great national event that had taken place the previous Saturday. One had to think of one's thousands of readers overseas, who possibly took one illustrated paper and no more.

The office closed on Saturday at midday, but I transferred the editorial department to my rooms in Craven Street. Thither, at midnight or thereabouts, would come the photographers with their pictures of the great event, and I would select sufficient to fill three or four pages. In the meantime, I had written up an account of the affair and posted it to the printer.

On Sunday morning I took the photographs in a cab to the engraver, who delivered the blocks at the office the first thing Monday morning. The lines to accompany the pictures I had written on the backs of the photographs, and so the printer had nothing to do but set up the type, get the pages made up, and pulls taken for my approval. By noon the whole paper was snugly in bed.

When there were no first-nights or great news events to handle, I used to spend the evenings writing my novels. It was desperately hard work, and I often felt worn out, but I put it to myself that I must have a second string to my bow unless I wished to remain in an office all my life. I am not an office man, and I must have realised it even in those early days.

I wrote "Love and a Cottage," "The God in the Garden," and "Love in June" in the hours between dinner and midnight whilst I was editing the *Sketch*, in addition to writing "Motley Notes," articles for the *Daily Mail*, short stories, and any matter that might be wanted in a hurry for the *Sketch*. On Saturday nights I played.

Towards the end of 1904 I decided to resign my position as editor in order that I might have all my time for writing. So I sent in my resignation, not without many regrets, and received in reply a very beautiful silver bowl from my directors, and a letter expressing regret at my decision, and a hope that I would continue my contributions as writer.

It was a wonderful experience, those years, and brought me into touch with a great number of interesting and famous people, about some of whom I hope to write in this volume.

I was succeeded by Capt. Bruce Ingram, also editor of the *Illustrated London News*, who still controls both these famous journals, and keeps them easily in the front rank.

CHAPTER XII

LORD NORTHCLIFFE

I WAS introduced to Lord Northcliffe—then Mr. Alfred Harmsworth—through the medium of a lawn-mower. This may seem strange, but it is quite true. Whilst I was still Editor of the *Sketch*, I had gone down to Sutton Place one Saturday afternoon to see a cricket-match between the *Daily Mail* and a local team of heroes. We went down by car, and Mr. Alfred Sutro, the dramatist, was one of the party. I remember making him very anxious because I would ride on the step of the car, and he expected every moment to see me hurled into the roadway and crushed beneath the wheels.

A group of us were standing on the cricket-ground before the match began, watching a man drive a motor-lawn-mower, which had not been long invented. It was the first I had ever seen, in fact, and I was fascinated by it.

“I should like a ride on that,” I said.

“Would you?” replied a quick voice. “Come along, then.”

It was Alfred Harmsworth himself. I had no idea he was one of the party. However, there was no help for it, so I strode boldly forward, and we walked across to the machine. He told the man to stop and I climbed into the driver’s seat.

“ Won’t you come up ? ” I asked.

“ No, thanks. I’ll walk alongside.”

So off we went, myself on the machine, the motor-man on one side, and the millionaire-proprietor of many journals on the other.

A little later in the afternoon, I was asked up to the house to tea, and here I noticed on an easel a very delightful crayon drawing of Mrs. Alfred Harmsworth, who was also present.

“ May I have that for the *Sketch* ? ” I suggested.

“ Not yet,” said my host, with a quick look at his wife.

I thought there must be something in the wind, and there was. A few days later his baronetcy was announced in the press.

“ May I have it now ? ” I wrote. “ And also your favourite photograph of yourself ? ”

Both came along by hand. His own photograph was a very charming one, showing him with his dog, which is sitting on a table. I doubt if any better picture of him was ever taken.

As we sat at tea in the delightful hall of Sutton Place I remarked on the quietness and solitude of the spot, although so near to London.

“ Yes, that’s why I’m so placid,” he flashed.

After tea we walked through the gardens, and he asked me all about my work on the *Sketch* and my ambitions for the future. I had at that time already written a good deal for the *Daily Mail* “ fourth page ” —that is, the leader page. I suppose my most successful series was one with the general heading, “ Real Conversations.”

This title I had borrowed from the late William

Archer. He had been writing what he called "Real Conversations" in a monthly magazine, which may have been real in the sense that he had conversed with his subjects on the topics given, but were certainly not realistic conversations. They were far too deep, and scholarly, and polished, and complete for that.

It struck me that it might be interesting to write conversations between all sorts of types that would be as real as one could make them. I did this for about twelve weeks in the *Daily Mail*, and since that time the idea has been adopted by scores of people, notably, perhaps, in advertisements.

What struck me on that afternoon about Alfred Harmsworth, and what always struck me whenever I met him subsequently, was the quickness of his mind and the acuteness of his sympathetic understanding. He seemed to know what was in your mind before you said it, and his answer was ready long before you had finished speaking. I formed a very great liking for him as we strolled about the gardens of Sutton Place on that lovely afternoon, a liking that strengthened and developed with each year that I came in contact with him.

There was one rather amusing little incident towards the close of that visit. We happened to see a prominent member of the *Daily Mail* staff admiring a rose-bush all by himself.

"Look at old So-and-So prowling about," said Alfred Harmsworth. "D'you think he'd like a drink?"

"No," I replied, sticking up for my pal. "I'm sure he wouldn't have one so early as this."

“ You think not ? We’ll see ! ”

“ I’m sure he won’t ! ” I persisted.

“ I’ll bet you he will ! So-and-So ! ” he called, and my friend joined us. “ My dear So-and-So,” went on the great man in a very earnest tone, “ will you do me a tremendous favour ? ”

“ Certainly,” was the answer.

“ Well, it so happens that I had delivered to me this morning from my wine-merchants some very special liqueur Scotch whisky. Now, as you know, I never touch whisky, and so I would value your opinion on this brand. Would you mind ? ”

“ Not at all,” came the reply, and we all went into the house.

Alfred Harmsworth shot a victorious smile at me as we went.

“ There’s an object-lesson for you,” said he.

I followed up the “ Real Conversations ” with a series called, “ My Country Cousin.” Whilst this was running, I was asked by the editor if I would care to join the staff as dramatic critic. I thought it over very carefully, for it meant resigning the editorship of the *Sketch*, and eventually said I would accept the position on the understanding that I was to have an entirely free hand, that my stuff should not be cut or altered, and that I should tell the exact truth, so far as in me lay, about every production which I attended, irrespective of the management or the players or the authors.

These conditions were willingly accepted, but a curious situation arose before I was definitely appointed. A friend of Sir Alfred Harmsworth, as he now was, had warmly recommended another young

man for the post of dramatic critic. I was not told the name of the young man, but it was agreed that we should attend alternate first-nights for a month or two, and the post would be given to the one who did best for the paper. So that for three or four months I was editing the *Sketch*, writing dramatic notices for the *Daily Mail*, and doing my own journalistic and literary work as well.

When Lord Northcliffe died, I saw it stated in several papers that he never took any real interest in the theatre. As his dramatic critic for three and a half years, I can vouch for it that he took a very keen interest in the theatre. I have several letters to myself, written in his own hand, which clearly prove the truth of this statement.

Had he not taken an interest in the theatre he would never have allowed me to write so candidly about all the new productions as I did. You may be quite sure that people who were accustomed to gross flattery, and did not get it, laid their grievances before the chief proprietor of the paper.

He once said to me, "You're the most abused man on my staff." And then he added, "That's why I value you."

A certain very famous actress once complained to him at a dinner-party that I had never given her a good notice. It so happened that I was a warm admirer of the art of this lady, and I was able to turn to my cuttings and prove that I had over and over again praised her to the skies—but not invariably the plays in which she chose to appear. Actors and actresses are too often like that. One "bad notice" will wipe out the memory of all the good ones that have

helped them on in their profession. I may have more to say on this subject later.

It was commonly reported, and is still believed by certain people, that I deeply offended Lord Northcliffe by making him the central figure of my novel, "Lord London." This is utterly untrue. I have a letter from him in which he says, "I am not a bit cross about it," and a copy of another letter in which he writes that he would be quite willing for the book to be re-published with a few lines expunged.

It never will be re-published in my lifetime. I believe the curious can get a copy for about £10. My own copy was lent and never returned.

I will now tell very briefly why I wrote this book, and what happened when it came into the hands of the unfriendly. I wrote it purely and simply out of gratitude. I had nothing to gain for myself by writing it. I had long resigned my position as dramatic critic on the *Daily Mail*, and I had also declined an important post on the editorial staff of that paper.

In the year 1911 I was married, and went to live in the country. Here I naturally met a great many people who knew nothing of the life of Fleet Street beyond gossip. When they learned that I had been on the staff of the *Daily Mail*, they all proceeded to speak of Lord Northcliffe as a person who was tyrannical, ignorant, mean, and so forth. How and why they had formed these ridiculous notions I knew not, but they had them, and I was thereby grieved and angered.

So I decided, perhaps rashly and quixotically, to bring the personality of the man before the public in the form of fiction. Of his private life I knew

nothing. All that would be pure fiction, and I would make it clear in my preface to the dullest individual on earth that it *was* pure fiction. The main outline of his career as a journalist had been told over and over again in a thousand papers. That would be my foundation; the chief value of my book, if any, being the presentment of character.

Imbued with these grateful thoughts I wrote my book, and it was published by the scholarly and high-class firm of Chapman and Hall. If they had seen anything in it to offend they would certainly never have published it.

It was a most unfortunate circumstance that the central figure of the book, quite unknown to me, was in America at the time of publication. This enabled unscrupulous people to cable to him and say that he had been vilely libelled and grossly misrepresented in a new novel which had just appeared in England.

He naturally cabled to his office to have the book stopped. When, later, he came to read it, he saw that he had been entirely misinformed as to the tenor and purpose of the book, and wrote me the letter from which I have quoted.

It may have been foolish of me to write the book at all, and I may have unwittingly offended certain people brought into it. But that my conduct throughout was entirely altruistic, no fair-minded person could possibly deny. What earthly good could accrue to me from antagonising the most powerful newspaperman in the kingdom, and one who, above all, had always proved himself a trusty friend?

Certain journalistic colleagues took this splendid

opportunity of jumping on the back of a man who may have won too many open events for their liking, but others were strictly fair and even complimentary.

The *Standard*, for example, said : "It is chiefly remarkable for the fidelity with which it tells the life-story of the man who revolutionised the science and the business of the modern newspaper. . . . There is nothing that may not be frankly told to anybody There is no reason why this novel should not be one of a series of books on self-help. No detail is missing to show how a young man with brains, courage, and confidence in himself may become rich and powerful."

The *Standard* was a great and an honest newspaper. The man who wrote that was entirely unknown to me, and is so to this day. Yet that was the book which was hurled back in my face as an outrageous insult, and of which my enemies took the trouble to cable to America that it was a scurrilous attack ! Had it indeed been what these anonymous curs said it was, how they would have hugged themselves with delight ! My real offence was that I had given to the world a true and sympathetic picture of the man they envied and detested.

The *Guardian* is generally admitted to be in the front rank of English journals. The *Guardian* said : "In future years Mr. Howard's novel may be quoted as a guide to self-help. . . . It is a fascinating career—success is always fascinating—and Mr. Howard has risen to the occasion."

In America the book was extensively reviewed and warmly praised, but I am not going to bore the reader with further extracts from notices of my own work, which always make tiresome reading for

others. The two I have quoted are the only two you will find in the whole of this narrative, I trust.

I have waited fourteen years to tell the truth about this episode, which has probably been forgotten by everybody except myself. I tell it now because the story of my struggles would be incomplete without it, and some would be quick to say that I had shirked the issue.

It is not my wish to shirk anything that should be undertaken. A very wasteful and senseless thing was done, and there's an end on't. Doubtless the experience did me good, for it has always been a weakness of mine to rate the workaday world too high.

CHAPTER XIII

JOYS OF A DRAMATIC CRITIC

WHEN I was extremely young, I used to think there could be no more delightful job in the world than that of dramatic critic on an important London daily newspaper. You were invited to the first-nights of all the plays, you had a comfortable stall reserved for you, you wrote what you thought about the play, and for all these delights you did not pay a farthing, but were actually paid a princely salary.

No doubt there are thousands of young men who still cherish the same illusions. To them, at any rate, this chapter may prove useful. To the general reader it may prove amusing.

It must be remembered that the *Daily Mail* is printed simultaneously in London and Manchester. This means that all important copy—and notices of first-nights were held to be important—had to be in the London office not later than eleven-thirty at latest, and very often not later than eleven. Plays began at eight, eight-fifteen, eight-thirty, eight-forty-five, and even nine o'clock. They finished at eleven-fifteen, eleven-thirty, eleven-forty-five, and sometimes after midnight. How, then, could the dramatic critic write his notice and get it into the office in time for the Manchester edition?

In the case of a matinee production or a Saturday

night production, all was well. One had plenty of time to sort out one's ideas and write a careful notice. But when a new play was produced on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday, you either had to get up and leave the theatre before the play was over, or you must attend the dress-rehearsal on the previous night.

Very often it happened that two or three first-nights came in a bunch, and in that case one could not attend the dress-rehearsal. There were also managers who would not admit critics to their dress-rehearsals. Charles Frohman was one of these. I remember that when he produced a play called "Nelly Neil," a musical play in which Miss Edna May returned to the stage and Joe Coyne made his first London appearance, I wrote to Frohman and asked him as a special favour to allow me to attend the dress-rehearsal. He replied that he could not do this as it was against his invariable rule, but he had great pleasure in enclosing the plot. The dear man had laboriously written out with his own hand, on six pages of the Savoy Hotel notepaper, the full plot of one of the worst musical comedies I ever saw in my life. It was very good of him, but the plot was the last thing I wanted.

These dress-rehearsals were terrible affairs. They were usually called at some unearthly hour like six or seven in the evening. This meant that you had to go without dining. If you slipped out for dinner after the first act—which would generally begin about eight-thirty—you might possibly miss the second act. On the other hand, if you did not slip out, the second act would come on at about ten.

It was always a mystery to me why they could not

run their dress-rehearsal straight through and put things right afterwards. In after years I had to conduct many dress-rehearsals, but I never allowed them to be held up for alterations. Each act went straight through, notes being made of anything wrong, and the company waiting on the stage after the act to hear what one had to say. Then, when the stage was empty, the scenery and lighting could be perfected. I have stayed in a theatre till six in the morning after a dress-rehearsal, getting the lighting right. But the company were all in bed and asleep.

However, it was not done like that in West-end theatres at the time of which I am speaking. We would collect in a darkened auditorium, sink into a stall with out hats and coats on—nobody ever takes off hat or coat at a dress-rehearsal ; I don't know why—and converse in low murmurs. After about an hour of this, somebody would pull the curtain aside and say, "Is Mr. Simpkins there ?" He was not there, of course, so we waited another hour while the neighbouring hostelries were ransacked for Mr. Simpkins, who was required to put a tack in an arm-chair.

I remember a dress-rehearsal at His Majesty's Theatre which nearly finished me off altogether. The play was "The Tempest," and it opened with a very realistic picture of the shipwreck. The stage was dark ; the ship rocked about in the most violent manner ; men shouted and cursed to their heart's content ; the rain lashed down and the waves seethed and boiled.

All this happened about dinner-time, and I felt so ill that I had to leave the theatre. I never saw that revival of "The Tempest." I went home and to

bed, and somebody else had to go from the office and write the notice.

Dress-rehearsals at Drury Lane were devastating affairs. They seemed to go on for ever, one huge scene after another. There used to be a legend to the effect that somebody was always killed on the stage on a first-night at Drury Lane. I don't know about that, but I know that lots of people in the audience nearly expired during the dress-rehearsal. The scenes were mere oases in the deserts of weariness.

The next day you wrote your notice and sent it to the office, and you then had to go again on the first-night and sit the piece through in case anything happened. Somebody might fall dead on the stage or the theatre catch fire. When I had to leave a first-night before the play was over, I always arranged with James Waters, who did the theatrical chat for the *Mail*, to wait to the end in case the theatre caught fire.

I was once very badly let down over a big production—the revival of “Much Ado About Nothing,” at His Majesty’s. I attended the dress-rehearsal, wrote my notice, and sent it along to the office by a District Messenger. I then dressed, dined, and went to the theatre again. All went according to plan, and there was nothing to alter in my notice, so I stayed to the end of the play, which happened round about midnight. I now went along to the office to revise my proof.

In the Editor’s room I found a large group of excited men.

“Where’s your notice?” they yelled at me.

“That’s all right,” I replied, with an easy smile. “I sent it by District Messenger hours ago.”

“ Well, it hasn’t come ! ”

“ Hasn’t come ? ”

“ No. You must sit down and write another notice. You can have seven minutes.”

Seven minutes in which to tell the whole population of the British Isles all about a production that had been talked of and boomed for months ! How would you like that, my envious young friend ?

Well, there it was. They gave me a pencil and a writing pad, and as I scribbled the printer’s boys tore the sheets off the pad, a few words at a time, and raced away with them. I did the notice in the seven minutes, and it was “ featured ” next day with many headlines.

The explanation of the matter was that the messenger-boy had saved himself time and trouble by dropping my notice into a letter-box. It turned up at the office the following morning. The firm were very apologetic and sacked the boy, but that did not help me very much.

In a way, though, I profited by this misadventure. I arranged to write my notices in my own rooms in Craven Street, and for a boy to come from the office on a bicycle to fetch them. The customary procedure, then, was like this. At eleven o’clock I left the theatre and hurried along to Craven Street, composing my opening sentences as I went. At eleven-ten I was climbing the stairs, pulling off my overcoat and dress-coat as I went up. At eleven-eleven I was at work on my typewriter, trying to tell the public all they wanted to know about the play and the players. At eleven-fifteen my housekeeper would come up from the basement to tell me the boy had arrived from the

office. At eleven-twenty-five I descended with the notice and handed it to the boy, who sped off on his bicycle. At eleven-thirty it was being telephoned to Manchester.

You will say that that is not the ideal way in which to write dramatic criticism. I never said it was. But will you tell me how else the work could be done unless you went to the dress-rehearsal, which was not always possible? Nowadays the theatres start early on first-nights in order to give the critics more time, but they did not do so in those days.

It was harassing work, and all the more harassing because every word one wrote was read by practically everybody, many of whom would disagree with it and try to make trouble for you if they could.

But they couldn't. I stood by my office and my office stood by me. I wrote exactly what I thought fit, no matter who the author, or the manager, or the leading players. There was no fear and no favouritism. So far as was humanly possible, justice was done to everybody, from the highest to the unknown actor or actresses, and many players now famous might admit that they had their first encouraging notice in the *Daily Mail*.

There was one amusing attempt to injure me in the eyes of my editor—one among many that were not so amusing or that I never heard about.

A certain well-known author had written to me about his play before the production. I had not answered the letter as there was nothing to answer. The play was not particularly brilliant, and I said so in the paper. A day or two later I received a letter from the office to the effect that the author had complained of

my writing an adverse criticism without being present at the performance ! It seemed that he had sent a messenger, after one of the acts, to ask me to come and speak to him, and the messenger had found my seat vacant and that it remained vacant.

Well, here was a splendid chance to prove me a villain. I hold that a man who damns a play without seeing and hearing the whole of it is a villain. I was never guilty of that, at any rate.

Then what was the explanation ? Simply that I had spotted the news-editor of my paper sitting in the back row of the stalls, that there was a vacant stall next to him, and I had kept him company for the remainder of the play. A perfect defence to the charge, I believe ?

The distinguished author now wrote to assure me that he would never dream of trying to make mischief between me and my editor, " which he knew to be impossible." In this case, I failed to fathom his reason for bringing the charge.

One manager was so irate about a little notice I wrote that he has kept up the vendetta for twenty years ! The play as originally produced was so bad that poor old Joe Knight, who sat next to me, kept groaning aloud. I cannot remember much about it now, and I have never seen it since, but I think there was one scene in which the leading lady—a very beautiful actress and a great popular favourite—had to be lashed on the bare back. No wonder Joe Knight groaned !

I said that entertainment of this sort could not long survive, and I was right. Alterations and improvements were at once made, and so the thing was turned

into a big monetary success. Even that did not soothe the manager. He kept nagging at my office about it, and I am told he does so to this day. *Requiescat in pace.*

Well, there is the information at first-hand for our young friend who is longing and dying to be a dramatic critic on a London daily, and who is quite sure he could do the job better than anybody is doing it or has ever done it.

The life is not a bed of roses. I know of no way in which a dramatic critic can be a popular person. If he damns a play he makes enemies of all concerned in it. If he praises a play, he makes enemies of all who are not concerned in it. If he neither damns nor praises he gets the sack.

I believe I had the reputation of being a very severe critic, but that reputation was made for me by others, not by myself through my notices. I have them all at my elbow at this moment, neatly pasted into a book, and I am astounded to find how many plays I praised with enthusiasm, and how many young actors and actresses I picked out for success, who have since, I am happy to say, justified my confidence in them.

The very first play I noticed for the *Daily Mail* was "Beauty and the Barge," by W. W. Jacobs and Louis N. Parker. I predicted that it would draw all the town, and described the enthusiastic reception by the audience. I said that Cyril Maude's Captain Barley was the finest piece of work that stood to his credit up to date. I see nothing very unkind or damning about that.

I was often accused of being unfair to Sir Herbert Tree—then Mr. Tree. This was simply because I

thought his Shakespearean productions overloaded with scenic and other effects, and I did not fancy him in romantic parts, such as Mark Antony and similar warriors.

But when he played Fagin in "Oliver Twist"—what of that? I said :

"Mr. Tree's Fagin, as everyone who has seen this brilliant character actor in such a part as Svengali will realise, is a wonderful study of the fawning, vicious, creeping, lying, miserly old Jew."

It was at the dress-rehearsal of "Oliver Twist," by the way, that I met Tree for the first and last time. And it was not in the "Dome" that we met. I have often read about some mysterious portion of the theatre called the "Dome," but I have never seen the inside of it and I very much doubt if I ever shall.

Our meeting came about in this way. I had been sitting in the stalls, watching the murder scene—the scene in which Bill Sikes murders Nancy. The murder took place off, Tree as Fagin being alone on the stage, listening to what was going on in the inner room.

When the curtain fell, I strolled out into the corridor for a cigarette, and happened to meet Dana, Tree's manager. He asked me to step into his parlour—a small reception-room or office quite close to the stalls' entrance on the right of the auditorium as you face the stage.

"Well," said he, "what do you think of the show?"

I told him I thought the show excellent, and certain of success. "But I think that murder scene might be strengthened," I added, rashly.

"How do you mean?" asked Dana, with interest.
"In what way?"

I was in for it now, so I let go.

“Well,” I explained, “here you have Tree on the stage, all alone, his face lit up by the candle he is holding. Nancy is being murdered in a room off. Fagin is listening. It is he who has incited Bill to commit the murder. He exults in the success of his ungentlemanly plot. But what happens? Hardly anything. You hear Bill, and you hear Nancy, and then all is over. I should strengthen that scene, and so give Tree the chance of a life-time. If you’re going to give ‘em melodrama, give it ‘em hot and strong. Let Nancy protest. Let her plead. Let the audience realise that she is pleading *for her life*, and that Bill is inexorable. And all the time Fagin stands listening, his evil old face illuminated by the flame of the candle. It seems to me a chance thrown away.”

At this very moment, Tree, still in his costume and make-up as Fagin, came into the room. Dana introduced me to him, and then added :

“Mr. Keble Howard thinks that murder scene might be much improved.”

Yes, but I had no intention of involving myself in all this tangle. Still, I would stick to my guns.

Tree was on the alert in an instant.

“In what way?” he asked, quickly, in that curious, husky voice. “Tell me! Tell me!”

So I had to go through the whole business once more. He listened with an almost avid interest and then said :

“Would you mind telling Mr. Carr that?” (Comyns Carr had done the adaptation of the book for Tree).

“Certainly, if you wish it,” I said.

"Thank you! Thank you! Will you come up on to the stage?"

He led the way and I had to follow. We went through the pass-door and on to the centre of the stage. The curtain was up, and the theatre pretty full of people. My brother-critics must have had the surprise of their lives when they saw me suddenly appear in the middle of the stage. However, I was not going to act or make a speech.

"Mr. Carr!" called Tree. "Mr. Carr! Where's Mr. Carr? Somebody find Mr. Carr!"

Comyns Carr eventually appeared.

"This is Mr. Keble Howard," said Tree. "He thinks we could improve the end of that act. Will you please tell Mr. Carr what you have been telling me? I think you're right."

Carr, of course, did not like it a bit. What author would? He was old enough to be my father, and a very experienced theatre hand.

"I don't agree!" he retorted the moment I had finished. "The scene's too strong as it is!"

"All right," I replied, soothingly. "It's not my business, but Mr. Tree asked me to tell you my opinion. I might add that I don't quite see how the curtain of the principal act of a melodrama can be too strong."

"Well, it is," repeated Carr. "Already a lady in the stalls has fainted."

I'm afraid I laughed at that, and so the episode closed. But I noticed the next night that the scene had been considerably strengthened. And no lady or gentleman fainted.

Occasionally a small hint of this kind is very useful

to a play. When people have been rehearsing a long time, they are apt to lose their perspective, and then a fresh eye may detect an opportunity that has been overlooked.

When Miss Lena Ashwell opened the Kingsway Theatre with a play called "Irene Wycherley," Norman McKinnel, who was her leading man, asked me to see the play in rehearsal and tell him, in a friendly way, if I could suggest any improvement in his "business." I was not doing the notice for the *Mail*, for reasons which I will explain later, and so I agreed.

McKinnel played a blind man—a very unpleasant character, so far as I can remember. In the big scene of the play he had to rage at some unfortunate person on the stage, his blindness adding to his fury because it rendered him impotent.

I suggested that at the very height of this scene he should deal a terrific blow at the head of his enemy.

"But I'm supposed to be blind," McKinnel reminded me.

"I know. That's the whole point. You bring down your fist with all your force—and *miss him!*!"

He did it, and the thrill in the audience may be imagined.

Returning to Tree for a moment, I think one of his best performances—partly because it was not really his line of country—was Colonel Newcome. And here a curious situation arose. When it was announced in the press that Tree was contemplating an adaptation of "The Newcomes," an article appeared in the *Daily Mail* headed, "Should Mr. Tree be allowed to play Colonel Newcome?"

It caused a tremendous agitation. I had not written

the article, nor did I know anything whatever about it until I saw it in print. But all Tree's friends declared that the play had been condemned even before it was staged.

This agitation brought me a letter from Lord Northcliffe, written by himself. He said, in effect, that most people thought I had written the article; but he wanted me to take no notice of it. I was to go to the theatre with a perfectly open mind, as he liked his papers to maintain their reputation for fairness.

I should have gone to the theatre with an open mind in any case, but this letter alone is sufficient to show that he was not wholly unmoved by the affairs of the theatre. Luckily Tree gave a very fine performance, and I was able to say so. When he was called before the curtain at the conclusion of the play he said, "I think we've won," whereupon I was glared at by dozens of his supporters sitting near by.

I have never yet had any play of my own booed, and I very much objected, when I attended first-nights, to the booing of plays or players. This attitude brought me a little personal boo, which I thought a great compliment, for I had never imagined that anybody except a few critics knew me by sight.

There had been a scrimmage at the Criterion over the closing of the gallery. Police were introduced to the pit to silence possible malcontents, and after the show—a play called, "A Clean Slate," by R. C. Carton—the police did their duty as they saw it. There was a bit of a fight, and a certain well-known actor went to the assistance of the police.

The next time this actor appeared at a first-night—it was a revival of "Trilby" at His Majesty's Theatre—

he was received with boos and cat-calls. I thought this unfair, so I tried to make it up to the actor by publishing his portrait and a nice little paragraph about him in the *Sketch*. At the next first-night after that I got my little hostile reception when I walked into the stalls. It almost turned my head.

A very great sensation was caused by a notice in the *Mail* of the pantomime at Drury Lane. Indirectly, I was the cause of it. I wanted to go home for Christmas, and so I asked the editor to send somebody in my place to do the pantomime. I pointed out that notices of the Drury Lane pantomime were always eulogistic, and that anybody could turn out the necessary column. I got leave to go away for Christmas.

On my way back to London, the day after Boxing Day, I bought a *Mail* at the bookstall at Leamington station, and settled down to read about the dear old panto. at the Lane. I had one of the shocks of my life. It was a terrible affair. The writer went clean over the ropes. He said the show was vulgar, and not suitable for children, and all sorts of iconoclastic things of that sort.

I think his name or initials were appended to the notice, but I had to bear the result. I suppose the people who eyed me with malevolence ever after thought I had put my deputy up to it. Nothing of the kind. It was all done off his own bat.

I cannot remember now the exact date of a certain signed article I wrote for the fourth page, but it had a very definite bearing on a career that has dazzled the entertainment world.

I will give you the sequel first.

One fine summer afternoon I was sitting on a bench outside the East Brighton Golf Club with dear old Fred Billington, who for so many years played all the Rutland Barrington parts in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas on tour.

Billington was complaining in his serio-comic way about the luck of the profession, and the things that might make one man or mar another.

“Look at Lauder!” he said. “We all knew Lauder in the business. He was nobody much until some blighter went and wrote a long article in the *Daily Mail* about him, and from that moment he was a star of the first magnitude!”

“Yes,” I said meekly. “I was the blighter.”

And this was how it happened. Edwin Ward, an old friend of mine, and the painter of the immortal portrait of Odell that hangs in the Savage Club, and of many other fine pictures, told me one night of a comedian at the Tivoli whom I ought to see.

“Come with me,” he said. “I think you’ll enjoy it.”

So I went with him to the Tivoli. The place was packed. When Lauder came on, it was clear that here was an artist of supreme ability. He did as he liked with the crowd. For a full minute—and that is a long time on the stage—he stood with his head against the back-cloth and made no sound or movement. The band was softly playing the air. And then he sang to them. However, I need not tell you about Lauder to-day.

I went to the editor of the *Mail* and got permission to write a signed column article about this man. I called it, “The Genius of Harry Lauder,” and I

described him and his methods as well as I could. (I often wish I had kept a copy of that article.)

The next night Lord Northcliffe took a large party of friends to see him, and from that time forward Lauder was a made man. I have never met him or heard from him.

The Court Theatre should really have a chapter to itself, but I suppose the present generation are not interested in an epoch that lifted the London theatre to a plane from which it speedily dropped, and to which it has never since risen.

The Vedrenne-Barker reign at the Court Theatre coincided, happily for me, and not unhappily for them, with my period as dramatic critic of the *Daily Mail*. All their new productions took place in the afternoon, and that gave one the chance to write about them. I could never quite get the space I wanted, but I did my best.

Granville Barker was already known as an actor and a producer of plays for the stage society. He was quite an avowed highbrow, and he has remained a highbrow ever since. Other highbrows fell away from grace, the most notable defaulter, so to speak, being the late William Archer who, after translating Ibsen and getting his works played in this country, ended his career by writing an out-and-out melodrama and making a small fortune out of it both here and in America. (It was Archer who set the fashion of bringing an umbrella into the stalls on first-nights. He often sat next to me, and when the play was very boring went off into sound slumber. At the end of the act he would wake up, and I had to tell him what had happened on the stage whilst he was sleeping. He

was a most delightful person, and as simple as a child.)

J. E. Vedrenne was known as a theatrical manager, but his personality and outlook were more or less a mystery. I knew the playgoing public must be curious about him when all the intellectuals and a good many non-intellectuals were flocking to the Court Theatre, and I therefore obtained permission from my Editor to interview Vedrenne and make a column article for the *Mail* about him and the work going on at the Court.

Vedrenne received me in his office at the Court, and we had hardly begun to talk when Barker looked in. I knew Barker pretty well, and he was evidently surprised to find me closeted with Vedrenne, the mere man of business. We both stared at him and he stared at us. He then muttered something amusing and went on up to his own office.

I asked Vedrenne the secret of this successful partnership.

“Well,” he said, “Barker is an artist with something of the business man in him, whilst I am a business man with something of the artist in me.”

“And now tell me,” I said, “how it is that in this little theatre we get the best acting in London.”

“I will tell you,” said Vedrenne, “if you will promise not to reveal it.”

I gave my promise, and I have kept it for two-and-twenty years—nearly twenty years after the dissolution of the Vedrenne-Barker partnership. As both of them have now retired from management, I think the secret may be given to the world. It is a very simple one.

“We never rehearse more than a fortnight,” said Vedrenne.

Of course, there was much more to it than that. There was this to it, for example. Barker was a very fine judge of acting, and he knew that he could cast any play perfectly if he could select the people he wanted. So they fixed their new productions for Tuesday and Friday afternoons, when there were no matinees at other theatres. In this way he had only to obtain the consent of the other managers to get all the actors and actresses he wanted—and reasonably at that, because it came to be a great honour to play at the Court. If the play was successful at the six matinees, it went into the evening bill, but not with the same cast.

The only criticism I have to offer on this wonderful Court Theatre management is that one had too much Shaw. I saw nearly all the Shaw plays, which have since grown popular, at the Court Theatre, and they became a little tiresome. “Man and Superman” I thought the best because it was the most complete. The others had a habit of ending in the middle, and then the rest of the afternoon would be filled out with conversations between the players, all in the dear old Shaw style. Because a thing is presented on the stage of a theatre it does not necessarily follow that it is a play. But this is not the time or place to discuss that point.

Several of the late St. John Hankin’s plays were first done at the Court. He used to get hold of quite neat little ideas, but the method of working them out was rather bloodless. In fact, all his plays seemed to me to lack “guts,” and I thought him a most fortunate

fellow to get them done at the Court. But poor Hankin was not satisfied, and ended his life by drowning himself in what he described as a "lovely pool." He was only one of many dramatic authors who perished in early life. Actors, actresses, and managers live much longer. I wonder why?

One could easily write a volume about the Court Theatre in these great days—surely the greatest it ever saw. Oddly enough, "Rutherford and Son," by Githa Sowerby, was also done first at the Court, but not under the Vedrenne-Barker management.

"Rutherford and Son" I consider to be one of the three best plays in modern English. It was produced after I had resigned my position on the *Mail*, and I went to see it as an ordinary playgoer. I was so impressed by the play that I did a thing I had never done since I gave up writing dramatic criticism, and have never repeated. I sought out Miss Sowerby, and introduced her personality and her play to the world at large through the medium of the *Daily Mail*.

Just one last instance of the joys of dramatic criticism. Everybody has heard of the farce, "When Knights Were Bold." I attended the first production, and I am bound to say that I was not particularly amused, much as I always admired the technique of the late James Welch. But I said at the conclusion of my notice, "The piece is certain of success."

Interviewed about the farce some years later, Mr. Welch was reported to have said: "Not one critic in London predicted the success of this play."

That is the worst of writing for an obscure journal like the *Daily Mail*. But it's all in the day's fun.

CHAPTER XIV

“COMPROMISING MARTHA”

IT was understood, when I joined the *Daily Mail* as dramatic critic, that I was not to produce plays of my own. If I wished to produce a play, I must first of all resign my position as critic. This was the policy laid down by the chief proprietor himself, and I did not quarrel with it.

And yet, whilst I was still holding that office, I did produce a play—a very successful little play—and although I tendered my resignation in accordance with my verbal arrangement, it was refused.

The circumstances were rather exceptional. The play was not written for a commercial theatre. It was written to fill up a Sunday evening bill. It is not the first time in the history of the theatre that the stop-gap has become the headstone of the corner.

I have a friend named Herbert Swears, who is well-known at the Bank of England, which he has served faithfully all his professional life, and also in London theatrical circles and to amateur players.

Swears was convinced—as I was also convinced, and am still convinced—that there were plenty of good plays being written which stood little or no chance of seeing the light. This belief is usually contradicted, and always by managers who like to talk about what they call “the dearth of plays.” This

dearth of plays is so terrible that even if a dramatist of established reputation and long experience writes to a manager humbly seeking permission to *submit* a play, it is quite on the cards that he will not get any answer to his letter. And this dearth of plays is so real that one young manager wrote to me, in reply to the usual request for permission to submit a play, and said that he had enough good plays in his desk to keep his firm going throughout his lifetime. (A year or two later his printer had a mortgage on the business.) And the dearth of plays is so actual that any little society which opens up for the purpose of producing new plays on Sunday nights can find the regular managers a winner without very much difficulty.

Well, Swears knew all about this condition of things, which is even worse to-day than it was then. So he decided to form a society of earnest and altruistic people to produce some of these plays. He called it "The Pioneers," and on the committee, in addition to our pious founder, were the author of "John Chilcote, M.P." ; W. J. Locke ; Mr. James Douglas ; myself ; and the late Mr. Hertz, father of Miss Margaret Halstan. There were also others whose names I have unfortunately forgotten at the moment.

We used to meet in a tiny room in Northumberland Avenue, and discuss the plays we had read. I remember that Swears once handed me a play to read with the author's name carefully erased. I handed it back with the remark that it seemed to me pretty average piffle—or words to that effect. Swears roared with laughter, having written it himself. I believe it subsequently made a small fortune for the Kendals, but I was not considering it from the commercial point of view.

We soon found two one-act plays that seemed worth doing. One was by Frederick Fenn, son of Manville Fenn, the famous writer of tales for boys—who, by the way, put me up for the Savage Club. The other was a Jewish play, very long and, I believe, very gloomy. I have forgotten who wrote it.

We wanted a third one-act play to make a triple bill. But we could not find one in a hurry. In his despair, Swears asked me if I had anything by me. I said I had a play in one act half written, but had put it aside in conformity with my understanding with the *Mail*.

“But that only applies to plays put up by a regular management for a run,” protested Swears. “Let me hear the first half, anyway.”

So I read him the first half of “Compromising Martha,” and told him how I proposed to finish it.

“That play will have an enormous success,” predicted Swears. “It will be done as a curtain-raiser at a West-End theatre, and it will then go into French’s list and be acted by amateurs all over the world.”

“In which case,” I said, “I shall have to give up my job on the *Mail*.”

“You won’t need it,” said Swears. “You were meant to write for the theatre, and write for the theatre you will, whatever else you have to give up.”

In the end I obtained permission to have this little play done on a Sunday night. The rest was hidden from us.

For the part of Martha, Swears recommended Florence Haydon, an elderly actress who had done some excellent work at the Court, but was quite un-

known to the general public. She was seventy years of age.

For the part of the curate we first of all got Dennis Eadie, but he threw it over one day—I never knew why—and then I secured Vane-Tempest. June van Buskirk, a very beautiful young actress from America, was cast for Monica, and the part of the Neighbour was played by Marianne Caldwell, the lucky actress who was engaged for the run of "Chu Chin Chow," I was told, never played in it, and drew a salary for four years.

I produced the little play myself, and we rehearsed at the Royalty and the Scala. I think it was the Scala that finished off Dennis Eadie. I never saw anybody walk so gloomily from one theatre to another. He must have known that the Royalty was his future spiritual home.

I never had the slightest doubt about the success of the play from the first rehearsal, and I have usually had the same confidence in my plays provided that they were produced as conceived and written, and not torn to pieces by alien minds. But I will deal with this subject in a later chapter.

The night of production turned out one of the wettest on record. The rain began with the rising of the curtain on the first play—Fenn's—and came down in such torrents that it could be heard in all parts of the theatre.

"Compromising Martha" came last of the three. The audience were already looking at their watches, and wondering what chances they had of getting a cab on a wet Sunday night.

Whilst the Jewish play was on, I went under the

stage, and there found dear old Florence Haydon sitting on a dress-basket.

“What on earth are you doing here?” I asked.

“Waiting for a dressing-room,” was the meek reply.

We then chatted on various stage topics, and she casually mentioned that she had played Desdemona to Edwin Booth’s “Othello.” And here she was, waiting for some young actress to make way for her in a dressing-room!

It was nearly eleven o’clock before my little play came on, and some of the audience had already disappeared. I stood on the side of the stage in the O. P. corner in order to give Miss Haydon a certain cue. She had to pretend to fall asleep whilst the Curate and Monica were hiding, one in a cupboard and the other on the stairs, to avoid being caught in Martha’s cottage by the gossiping neighbour. At rehearsal Miss Haydon had asked me how she was to know when they were safely hidden. It would quite spoil the plot if she saw the whisk of Monica’s skirt as she disappeared.

“I shan’t hear the door,” she pointed out.

So I arranged to be on the stage and give her the signal to wake up by clicking my fingers.

I gave her the signal all right, but, to my horror, she did *not* wake! I gave it again. Still she slept, and the stage was silent.

“*Wake up!*” I whispered, desperately.

She slept on.

“*Wake up!*” I said aloud.

Then she heard me and woke. The play was just saved.

But it was nearly ruined again. At the end of the

play, Martha is left alone. She raises her apron, gently wipes a tear from either cheek, and on that the curtain comes stealing down.

All this I had most carefully explained to the stage-manager, who was to ring down. When the moment arrived for the curtain, I looked across to the prompt corner and he was not there! There was nobody to ring down!

I contemplated dashing round, and then I saw him chatting with somebody at the back of the stage. Suddenly he realised the meaning of the silence, sprang to his corner and touched the button.

Down came the curtain. Considering the size of the audience, the applause was wonderful, and I think I took a call. The notices, also, were very fine, and I waited confidently for the managers to apply for the rights.

Nobody did. One-act plays were in demand at that time as curtain-raisers, yet nobody, not even the managers who had seen it on the Sunday night, wanted "Compromising Martha."

At last I wrote to Mr. Frederick Harrison, at the Haymarket Theatre, having obtained permission from my office to place this play if I could, since it was only a little one. Mr. Harrison replied that he would like to read the play.

Having read it, he agreed to put it up at the Haymarket—quite the best home for the one-act play in those days—but he was going to revive "The Man from Blankley's" for a few weeks. Would I like to have my play done in front of "The Man from Blankley's," or would I wait for the new production, which would probably have a much longer run?

I chose the bird in the hand. So the little play was again cast. Miss Haydon was retained as Martha, but all the others were changed, it being customary to employ people already on salary to play in the curtain-raisers. Thus the Curate fell to E. W. Tarver, Hawtrey's understudy ; Elfrida Clement played Monica ; and Lydia Rachel played the Neighbour. A very charming little scene was specially painted by Bruce Smith.

Having already produced the play myself with success, I wished to do so again, and to this Mr. Harrison agreed. But, unknown to me, he asked Charles Hawtrey to look in at rehearsal—he was playing lead, of course, in "The Man from Blankley's"—and give us a few hints.

Hawtrey duly arrived at the theatre one morning, and appeared on the stage. I was in the stalls with Mr Harrison, who explained to me what a wonderful producer Hawtrey was. (And so he was, I believe. I have heard many actors praise his producing to the skies.)

We were taking the final scene, where the Curate and Monica try to persuade Martha not to "tell on them." Hawtrey told Tarver and Miss Clement to stand behind Martha's chair, facing full to the audience, and play the scene like that, over her head. This seemed to me unnatural, and I asked Mr. Harrison's permission to say so.

Hawtrey seemed rather nettled at my interference. After all, I had written the play and produced it once with success, so I was on fairly firm ground.

"Have you read the play, Mr. Hawtrey?" I asked.

"I've read it twice," was the answer.

The rehearsal continued.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," I said again, "but *have* you read the play, Mr. Hawtrey?"

"I've already told you I read it twice. However, I don't seem to be wanted here, so I'll go."

Away he went, and we returned to the business as before.

The little play again went wonderfully well, and I was called before the curtain, which is not usual in the case of the curtain-raiser. All the notices were excellent.

After the second performance I was in Mr. Harrison's room when Hawtrey came in. After speaking to Mr. Harrison he turned to me and said :

"I see that your colleagues stood by you."

"Yes," I said, cheerfully. "We all love each other in our profession, just as you do in yours."

He vanished. It was just a trifle of tilting, and no harm was done. No critic admired Hawtrey's acting more than myself, and no one wrote of him more enthusiastically than I did.

When the run of "The Man from Blankley's" ended, and another play followed at the Haymarket, "Martha" still retained her place in the bill. In all, the piece was performed 246 times, and preceded four full-length plays. A fresh curtain-raiser eventually being required, I wrote a sequel, called "Martha Plays the Fairy." There was a fifth character in this, the Squire, played by Holman Clark.

The two little plays were both published by French, and could be played as separate items or as a two-act play, the title in that case being, "Old Martha." At the suggestion of French's, I wrote a third play on the same theme, which could be sandwiched between the other two, or played alone. When played alone it was

called "Martha the Soothsayer," and showed Martha telling fortunes in a tent at the village flower-show. Should all three pieces be performed as a three-act play, the title used was the punning one of, "All Through Martha."

However, there are not many amateurs who do not know these little Martha plays.

I once tried to get the Coliseum people to put on "Compromising Martha" with a very famous actress as Martha. (This was after the death of Miss Florence Haydon, whom none could surpass in the part.) They said the Haymarket public and their own were not the same. I had thought they were precisely the same.

As I write these lines comes the news of the death of Mr. Frederick Harrison, manager for many years of the Haymarket Theatre. I shall have to refer to him later in my story, but I would like to say here and now that no more courteous manager ever presided over the fortunes of a theatre. Whether Harrison accepted your play or refused it, you could be sure of courteous treatment. He always answered letters, for example, and that is more than can be said of certain men much younger than himself.

He mounted his plays, including the curtain-raisers, perfectly. No other word would be suitable. I remember that when we were rehearsing "Martha," Monica had to look at her wrist-watch. She had no wrist-watch. Mr. Harrison at once sent out and bought her a wrist-watch. Since she was the daughter of the Squire, it had to be a gold one, and a gold one it was.

When you went to see him, he received you in a charming old-fashioned room at the back of the theatre, made you completely at home, and chatted

away on all sorts of topics. At the conclusion of the interview, he invariably escorted you personally through the theatre and down the stairs to the entrance-hall.

The Haymarket was run on precisely those lines. From the moment you entered the front hall, and encountered the beaming smiles of Mr. W. H. Leverton—Bill Leverton, they affectionately call him—you were happy and comfortable. Horace Watson, too, now the General Manager, was the ideal Acting-Manager. In short, this was a place apart. You had left the bustle and noise and dirt of the streets, and you were in the Haymarket. A charmed house.

Any play produced in this theatre started odds on. It was one of my ambitions to have a full-length play done at the Haymarket, and I nearly succeeded, but not quite. This was not Harrison's fault. The play in question was "*The Cheerful Knave*," and I wrote it round the company playing "*The Man from Blankley's*"—Charles Hawtrey, Weedon Grossmith, Henry Kemble, Fanny Brough, Lydia Rachel. All now dead.

Leverton is one of the most remarkable personalities in the land of the theatre. He has spent the whole of his life at the Haymarket. He was there with the Bancrofts, with Tree, with Harrison and Maude, and then with Harrison.

He is also a wit. We were once watching a cricket-match on the Sussex County Ground. I complained that watching matches took up too much time and interfered with work.

"Where can I live and avoid the temptations of cricket?" I asked.

"Venice," said Leverton.

CHAPTER XV

“THE SMITHS OF SURBITON”

IN view of the long and still continuing popularity of this little story, its origin may be of interest.

I have mentioned, I think, that I wrote for the leader-page of the *Daily Mail* a series of dialogues called, “Real Conversations.” It was these dialogues that led to the writing of “The Smiths of Surbiton.”

Sir Leicester Harmsworth—at that time Mr. Leicester Harmsworth—had conceived the idea of founding a journal in this country on the lines of that enormously successful American publication, *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. He sent for me and told me that he wanted a serial story.

“I have long thought,” he said, “that somebody should write the story of the lives of a quite ordinary married couple. It is a surprise to me that it has never been done. The sort of story I mean would have nothing in it of a sensational kind—except in so far as sensations do occur in the most commonplace lives. It would have to be absolutely true to life, not coloured up in any way, or there would be no point in writing it.

“This means that the people would have to be absolutely natural and unforced. They must not talk

in epigrams. Personally, I don’t care for people, either in books or in real life, who talk in epigrams.

“Now, do you think you could write me a story like that for my new magazine? It’s a pretty good chance for a young author. We’re going to spend a lot of money advertising this magazine, and this will be one of the principal features and the only serial story.”

“What class of people do you want this couple to be?” I asked.

“Oh, quite humble folk. The sort of people who would live in a twenty-six pound a year house. Begin with the day of their wedding, and take them right through their lives—all the little incidents, humorous and pathetic—until they’re quite old people.”

Thus was the first of the “three generations” stories, now so frequently done, brought into being. Mr. Leicester Harmsworth suggested it, and I wrote it.

I first called it, “At Ladysmith Lodge,” which will give you an idea of the date. I think that first instalment would probably have been written about the autumn of 1904. I know I was still editing the *Sketch* at the time, a position which I resigned at the end of 1904.

In that original first instalment, which is now presumably lost, as I never kept a copy of anything, the young couple had been married that day, and were waiting their turn to board the tram that would take them to their little home. The queue was a long one, and it may have begun to rain. I forget.

Suddenly the bridegroom was seized with a fit of recklessness. He hailed a hansom, bundled his

bride into it, and they drove in state to "Ladysmith Lodge."

The next day was Sunday, and the bride's mother paid them a visit, giving the bride advice on the management of a husband, which advice, after she had gone, led to the first little tiff and the first joyous reconciliation.

I wrote this instalment and sent it in. Some days or weeks later, when I was very busy in the editorial room at the *Sketch* office, the assistant editor of the *World and His Wife* was announced. (That was the title of the new magazine.) The matter was urgent.

"Anything the matter with the first instalment?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Mr. Harmsworth likes it very much. But he's changed his mind about the social status of these people. He wants you to re-write the instalment, and make them people with about six hundred a year. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I suppose I can."

"This will mean, of course, a change of title. We've secured the whole of the front page of the *Daily Mail* to-morrow to advertise the magazine, and of course we should like to include the title of the serial story. So could you let me have it now?"

"Do you mean now—right away?"

"Yes, please. The proof of the advertisement is waiting."

"Oh! Let's see. Six hundred a year? That means the suburbs. And they're to be quite ordinary, typical, everyday people. How would 'The Smiths of Surbiton' do?"

"Sounds excellent. I'll submit it to Mr. Harms-

worth. And you'll let us have the new instalment in the course of the next few days? Right you are! Good morning!"

He bustled off, and I went home at the end of the day to write my opening chapters anew. I may say that they came very easily, as did the whole story. The serial ran for thirteen months, and I used to write three short chapters each month. Each chapter took me about an hour, so that I wrote the book in thirty-nine writing hours.

It happens to be the shortest book I ever wrote, which is interesting in these days when people are talking about long novels. “The Smiths of Surbiton” runs to fifty-four thousand words. The average novel is eighty to a hundred thousand words. I don't think the public are so impressed by length as by interest.

Whatever my demerits as an author—and I know only too well how many and ever-present they are—I do always keep in front of me one maxim—“The reader must not be bored.” No doubt the reader very often is bored, but think how more bored he would be if I wrote half a million words to each book instead of seventy-five to eighty thousand!

My critic on the hearth constantly tells me that I race along, leaving the reader breathless; that I should be more expansive in my style; that I am too “telegraphic.” I am sure it is all true, but I believe it is a fault on the right side. I have a very genuine dread of boring any living soul, either with my writings or with my company. I have often passed old friends in the street, friends whom I had not seen for months or even years, rather than hail them, in case they should be busy. In the same way, as I have said, I keep my

chapters and scenes as short as possible rather than bore the reader by squeezing them to the utmost. What is more appalling than to take up a novel and see page after page of close print, in which you know that nothing is happening beyond an analysis of the heroine's soul? It would have to be an awfully interesting soul to be worth all that.

Well, here I am, giving you a sample of the very fault which I try to avoid.

My little story, I am glad to say, pleased the readers of *The World and His Wife* very much—in fact, the number of letters it brought to me and to the Editor induced Mr. Leicester Harmsworth to start a new feature. This he called, “A Novelist’s Letter-Bag,” and in it I dealt with, and answered to the best of my ability, all the queries sent to me on life and conduct by all sorts of people in every part of the kingdom and in the colonies.

I was only twenty-nine years of age when I wrote this story, but I think they put me down as an octogenarian. At any rate, they told me all their troubles and asked for my sage advice. It was a great responsibility for a young unmarried man, and I hope my replies led to no harm.

When the story was nearing its end, my agent began to get busy about the book-rights. I was at that time publishing with Messrs. Chapman and Hall, but Mr. Arthur Waugh, the managing director, was very doubtful about “The Smiths.” He said that the serial publication would have an adverse effect on the book. I argued that people seldom read a serial all through. If they picked up an isolated copy of the magazine, and liked the instalment of the serial, they would wait

until it appeared in book form and then get the book.

Be that as it may, Mr. Waugh's fears were groundless, for the book was a great success from the very first. My friend Frank Reynolds had illustrated the story in the *World and His Wife*, and these charming and brilliant drawings I managed to secure for the book. It is not always that illustrations help a book, but when they are as good as these were—exactly right to the last touch—then they must benefit the book.

I have often wondered what became of those original drawings. I would like very much to have them hanging on my walls, but I have never seen or heard of them since.

We are frequently told that English humour is not appreciated in the United States of America. This is the greatest nonsense, as has been often proved. Take the case of this little story. I was asked to call on the London representative of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, who spoke with the utmost enthusiasm about my Smiths, and then and there bought certain chapters for the publication she represented at a figure that would astonish London editors. I think she would have bought the lot had I not stedfastly refused to have American words substituted for English ones.

In answer to this suggestion I said: "This is a story of English people. They are and must be essentially English. If you put American terms into their mouths, you will make them neither one thing nor the other."

Her answer was that they were typical of married people the world over. It was a subtle compliment, but I did not swallow it whole.

The book was published in America by McClure, Phillips and Co., and without alteration save that the title was shortened to "The Smiths," and theatre was spelt "theater." I can understand the reason for calling the book "The Smiths," but I cannot understand why "theatre" should be spelt "theater." The word is derived from the Latin *theatrum* and from the Greek *theatron*. The French call it *theatre*, and we call it theatre. I see nothing to justify "theater."

The American critics, despite their supposed dislike of English humour, received it just as kindly as the English critics.

After Messrs. Chapman and Hall had finished with the book, the firm of Cassell took it up, and published an edition at sixpence. When all these were sold the firm of Skeffington published it at two shillings. Now the publishers of this book have it (in succession to Fisher Unwin), and I think they ask three-and-sixpence for a copy. So we are gradually getting back to the original price.

A year or two ago I suddenly thought I would make a play of it. A mad notion, perhaps, because the essence of the book was that it had no plot. In fact, the subtitle reads, "A Comedy Without a Plot." Still, what plot had "Milestones," which came into being some years after my story of three generations?

I had given myself a pretty difficult task, and I made it still more difficult by deciding to keep all the action in one interior scene. The usual fault in the dramatisation of books is the splitting up of the story into four or five acts, and the acts into four or five scenes. This is because the adapter cannot see how to tell in one scene what the novelist has told in fifty or a hundred.

Nothing tires an audience so much as constant dropping of the curtain. Change your scene by all means, but don't keep on giving them the story in driblets. Give it in chunks, as much as they can masticate and swallow at a time. It is just as fatal, on the other hand, to try to hold the attention of an audience beyond a certain breaking-point.

So I got the whole story into the sitting-room of the little villa at Surbiton. In the first act we had the earliest scenes—mainly comedy. In the second act we had Ralph's promotion in the City and the sudden illness of the baby; in the third act the Smiths were elderly folk, and the young people were carrying on the endless story.

The next question was, to whom should I send the play? And the answer was, “To nobody.” There was not a management in London who would be likely, in my opinion, to look at it. And yet it seemed to me a play suitable for repertory theatres and for amateurs—whose work becomes increasingly important each year.

I held my hand for a long time, and at last I was asked to submit the play to the Repertory Players. I did so, and they waxed wildly enthusiastic. A date for production was fixed, the play was cast, and rehearsals started.

And here I discovered—what I should have known from the first after my own experiences with the Pioneers—under what difficulties these Sunday play-producing societies work. Almost insuperable difficulties. They never know, for example, where and when they can rehearse. The company are seldom all present at once until the dress-rehearsal. And

certain parts have to be given to unsuitable people because it is their turn to act.

We rehearsed in my flat at South Kensington, in a public-house in Maiden Lane, and at the New Theatre, where the play was eventually produced. I shall always remember the public-house in Maiden Lane by reason of a rather amusing remark that was made to me by a member of the cast—a very young lady who had recently, I think, finished her course of instruction at the Academy of Dramatic Art.

It so happened that I arrived early for rehearsal, and she was the only person present.

“Are you the author?” she asked, condescendingly. I admitted the truth of the accusation.

“H’m. You seem to know quite a lot about our business.”

I did not think it necessary to explain that I had been connected with “our business” for at least five-and-twenty years as author, critic, actor, manager, and producer.

Some of the cast I did not see at all until almost the final rehearsals. It was then very difficult to exercise the veto contained in my contract. I do not wish to imply that any of these young people were incompetent—far from it—but some of the parts might easily have been more suitably cast. It is a very great mistake to jeopardise the success of a play by including in the cast some member of a society whose turn it is to have a part. Even a comparatively small part, badly cast, may ruin a play.

On arriving at the theatre for the performance, I went in by the stage entrance. As I was crossing the

stage to get to my box through the pass-door, I heard one of the stage-hands say to another :

“ ‘Oo’s this play by they’re doin’ ?”

“ Bloke called Kebble ‘Oward,” was the answer.

“ Taken from a book, ain’t it ?”

“ ‘Sright. ‘E wrote the book twenty year ago, an’ ‘e’s bin all that time lookin’ fer the plot.”

Good.

The first act went very well. The theatre was not full, there being a counter-attraction that night in a big theatrical dinner. But we had quite a nice little audience.

After the first act a young lady came dashing breathlessly to my box and said : “ Are you the author ?”

I could not deny it if I would.

“ Oh !” she went on. “ I’m the press agent for the Repertory Players. Will you kindly tell me what else you’ve written ?”

“ Certainly,” I replied, “ if you can keep the curtain down for about an hour.”

The second act, I say deliberately, as a pretty experienced hand, was a worth-while event in theatrical history. No, I am not belauding the author, but an actress. That actress was Miss Doris Lloyd, who played Mrs. Smith. I know of only one other actress on our stage who could have moved the audience in the scene of the baby’s illness as Miss Doris Lloyd did.

I was not in the least surprised, because I knew at rehearsal that here was a genius. Always in this scene she had drawn tears from me, and that Sunday night she had all the audience in tears. Not only so, but when I went round to the back of the stage to congratu-

late her after the act, I found many of the players in tears as well !

This may sound comic to those who have no feeling for the humanities, and no appreciation of beautiful acting. But it was not comic. It was tragic that such a piece of work should not have instantly placed Miss Doris Lloyd in the front rank of her profession. In that scene, properly supported throughout—as she was, let me say, in many instances—she could have drawn all London.

What happened ? Well, it was only a Sunday night show, and nobody took the trouble to find out if anything was amiss with the rest of the play, and, if so, what. So the play was forgotten, Miss Doris Lloyd's performance was forgotten, and the last I heard of her was that she had gone to America to act for the films. Imagine any woman with that exquisitely tender voice being allowed to go to America to act in the films !

That was the tragedy of it all.

The last act was miscast and under-rehearsed. I did not like it myself, and I knew nobody else would like it. But how easy to have reshaped it, cast it well throughout, and made a success of the whole thing, with Miss Doris Lloyd as the shining star !

I am grateful to the Repertory Players for their enthusiasm and their hard work, and I wish them all well in their careers. But I shall never again have any play of mine performed by a Sunday night producing society. You may point to successes here and there, but my opinion is that such performances do not give any play a fair chance.

For one thing, the author has not sufficient control.

The company are playing for nothing, or next to nothing, and it is naturally hard for them to forget it. They all feel like little managers and manageresses. They resent being talked to by an author for whom they are working without payment. It is an unsatisfactory method—at any rate, from the point of view of the author. On the other hand, if I were a young actor, I would act in as many of these shows as I could.

CHAPTER XVI

THEATRICAL CELEBRITIES

BEFORE I sat down to write this book, I made a rough plan of the contents, and I find that I allowed myself one chapter in which to talk about actors, actresses, managers, and authors.

On looking through the list of those theatrical celebrities with whom I have come into personal contact in the course of my work, I find that there are more than sixty whose names are world-famous. Of all these I have something interesting to say, but it must be in a special volume. In the meantime, I will run through my notes very lightly, taking the names haphazard, just as I jotted them down.

The first on the list is Mrs. Langtry. I met Mrs. Langtry only once, and that was just before she opened the Imperial Theatre. Rumour—and a press-agent—had naturally been busy about the wonderful dresses to be worn by this really beautiful woman, and I wanted exclusive photographs of her in all her costumes for the *Sketch*.

So I called on her at the Kennington Theatre, where she was playing at the moment, and we had a cosy little chat, of which two lines still remain in my memory. As I was leaving she gave me both her hands, smiled as only Mrs. Langtry could smile, and

said: "Goodbye! You'll give me a whole number of the *Sketch*, won't you?"

"Yes," I said fervently, "and a Supplement as well!"

She didn't mean it, of course, and neither did I. But it was a pretty passage.

The next names on my list recall a tragic episode. One morning John Latey called me into his office and introduced me to one of the loveliest girls I had ever seen. Her name was Ida Yeoland, and with her was her sister, Edith Yeoland, also a very striking-looking girl.

Latey made a great feature of the Yeoland sisters, and helped them all he could. Full-page pictures were published, and under that of Ida Yeoland he wrote, "The freshest young beauty on the English Stage." And so she was.

A few months later, disappointed in their profession, both committed suicide.

Sir Henry Irving I never met, but that was my own fault. My friend Chance Newton often offered to take me to the Lyceum and introduce me to the great actor, whose genius I worshipped, but I would not go. Rightly or foolishly, I have always shrunk from thrusting myself on the great ones of the earth. If the meeting comes about spontaneously, that is quite another matter.

When Sir Henry Irving was returning to this country after a tour in America, I suggested to the committee of the Savage Club that he should be invited, by cable, to dine at the club immediately after his arrival. The committee took up the idea, and not only invited Irving, but all the other actor-managers

as well. So there we had, cheek by jowl at the top table, Sir Henry Irving, Sir Herbert Tree, Sir George Alexander, Edward Terry, Lewis Waller, and one or two others. It was a great night, and Irving made a beautiful speech, delivered as he alone could deliver it.

I went to see Irving at the Lyceum Theatre late in his career. The old theatre was in a sad state of disrepair, the walls peeling with the damp. He played "The Bells"—a bad play, in my opinion. But the genius of the man triumphed over all. You forgot the fusty theatre and the artificiality of the play. His figure and his personality and his voice held one spellbound again, as it always had. How can it be possible for another Henry Irving to tread this earth?

I jump from Sir Henry Irving to Edna May. She had made her great success in "The Belle of New York" not so very long before I joined the *Sketch*, and we published full-page pictures of her almost every week. There was no *Tatler* then, and no *Bystander*. No *Daily Mirror* or *Daily Sketch*. Picture-postcards were not yet the vogue. Pictorial publicity of stage favourites was almost confined to ourselves, the *Sporting and Dramatic*, and the ladies' journals.

With the cordial approval of Latey, I started a series of articles in the *Sketch* called "Boudoir Interviews." The idea was to call upon the most beautiful actresses of the day, and get them to talk about the subject in which the public would expect them to be most interested.

I began the series with Miss Edna May, and the subject I selected was "Love." There was a great deal about Love in the "Belle of New York," and the idea seemed good. We retired to the drawing-room,

leaving mother and two sisters in another room, and there conversed, solemnly and seriously, about Love.

I remember asking Miss Edna May whether she thought it better to love or to be loved. After a little reflection, she replied, in her gentle, dove-like little way, that it must always be better to love than to be loved.

At this instant there was a terrible crash from somewhere overhead. Shrieks and scamperings followed, and a huge mirror was found smashed to atoms. All the ladies turned white, for a new play was due at the Apollo in which Miss May was to star, and a broken mirror is an unfailing portent of misfortune. But it was all right. The play succeeded.

We return to Sir George Alexander. I once wrote to him about something I proposed to deal with in an article, and he replied by asking me to lunch with him at his house in Pont Street. I was rather frightened, but I put on my frock-coat—we all wore frock-coats on solemn occasions in those days, young feller, and very hot they were—and went.

I rather expected a party, but we lunched alone. It was a solemn affair. Alexander was never hilarious, so far as I know, and on this occasion he was like a Prime Minister. The longer we lunched, the more silent and gloomy I became. He must have thought me an exceedingly dull dog, and very likely he was right.

I met him again some years later when I was in the chair at the Whitefriars Club, and he was the guest of the evening. We talked about plays, of course, and I assured him that there were plenty of good plays going begging, but that managers did not know how to find them. He said :

“Look here. I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll send you twenty plays from the pile in my theatre waiting to be read. If you find a play I can produce at the St. James’s, I’ll give you so much.”

I declined the fee but agreed to read the plays. Down they came, and I must admit that I had never thought there could be so much tosh in this world. But out of the twenty I did find a play which I thought very fine and likely to be a success.

He did not produce it, but when I was running the Croydon Repertory Theatre the author of this play wrote me. He said he had been informed by Sir George Alexander that I was a great admirer of his play, and would I do it at Croydon? I replied that it was far too expensive for me to attempt, which was true. But I could see Alexander laughing in his sleeve.

I must not leave Sir George Alexander without recording a generous thing that he did. Before I opened at Croydon, I held a meeting in the theatre, which was addressed by Sir George, Granville Barker, and myself. Sir George in his speech said that I might produce any of the plays in his possession without fee. I held him to it the following year and wisely chose “The Importance of Being Earnest.”

Miss Irene Vanbrugh I have had the honour of meeting on various occasions, and once, when giving me tea at her house, she told me the ambition of her life. She was doubtless joking, and yet it is interesting. She said that her main ambition was to play “principal boy” in pantomime! So here is a chance for some enterprising entrepreneur.

Miss Violet Vanbrugh I know, of course, far better than her sister, as I had the honour of appearing with

her at the Coliseum in my duologue, "The Test Kiss," and also at various leading halls throughout the kingdom. I will tell of that adventure in a later chapter.

Miss Prudence Vanbrugh, daughter of Violet Vanbrugh, made her debut at a Sunday League concert given at the Palladium in this same piece, "The Test Kiss," and I took a hand in the rehearsals. She combines in herself very extraordinarily some of the qualities of her mother and some of her aunt, Miss Irene Vanbrugh. Needless to say, she is a very charming girl.

Sir John Martin Harvey I have met only once, and that was at his house in London. I tried to persuade him to play Oliver Cromwell—not the Oliver Cromwell of popular fiction and light-hearted history-books, but the real Oliver Cromwell, who died protesting his belief in King and Constitution. But he declined, on the ground that Oliver Cromwell was a big man and the public would never accept him in the part. I am sure he was wrong.

Whilst we were talking, the subject of the art of playwriting cropped up.

"The essential thing in a play," said Sir John, "is—what's the word I want?"

I suggested several words, but none of them was right.

"No, no, no! The essential thing is—Dear me! I've got the word on the tip of my tongue! The essential thing is—!"

He strode to and fro, beating his forehead and vainly striving to remember the essential thing in a play. But it was no good. He had to give it up, and I left the house and a very worried tragedian.

The next morning I received from him a postcard with one word on it.

“*Suspense.*”

I have never seen a more beautiful setting of “Hamlet” than that presented to the public by Sir John Martin Harvey, and his performance of the part has a strangely pathetic beauty of its own.

One of the most romantic and engaging people on the stage is Robert Loraine. I met him for the first time in the Savage Club ; it was the day that Bleriot flew the Channel. He had been over to see Bleriot start, and had just returned by boat and train. His excitement and enthusiasm were extraordinary. It is not too much to say that, hours after the event, he was vibrant with emotion at the success of his brother-airman. Loraine was the first aviator to fly to Ireland, so he realised the meaning of this Channel flight.

There is a dash and a verve about his acting that always appeal. And he is a good fellow, too. He had a play of mine for some little time which he was anxious to produce, but I fancy that his “backer” preferred him in romantic parts. Loraine was so convinced that the play ought to be done that he took it personally to another actor-manager, and tried to prevail upon him to put it up.

To Sir Frank Benson I owe my early education in the plays of Shakespeare. Each April he used to occupy the Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, and each year he revived one of the plays not usually performed. I think I must have seen the Benson company in every actable play Shakespeare ever wrote. Sir Frank as Timon of Athens I shall never forget. How he growled over his raw food !

When the Great War first began, a lot of us joined the United Arts. We drilled for a time at Earl's Court, and I often found myself next to Sir Frank. When we were standing at ease, his eye would wander speculatively over the vast expanses of decaying canvas that the scene-painters had erected for the beautification of the Exhibition.

I was secretly in love for many years with Mrs. H. B. Irving (Dorothea Baird). She never knew it, of course, but hundreds of other undergraduates were in a similar plight when she made her first appearance with the O.U.D.S. A vision of loveliness indeed ! And, as I came to know later, as gentle and charming as she was lovely.

H. B. Irving was one of the dearest fellows that ever hated acting. I venture to assert that he hated acting, because he once said to me, "I want to find a play that I can tour all round the world, after which one need never act again."

After all, in his book Sir Francis Forbes-Robertson makes a similar confession. "Never at any time have I gone on the stage without longing for the moment when the curtain would come down on the last act." And yet there are still people who believe that the main ingredient in the composition of the actor is conceit.

The first time I ever met H. B. Irving I played in a charade with him. It was at a Sunday evening party given by the parents of Miss Margaret Halstan. I was very young, and it struck me it would be great fun to play charades with real live actors and actresses, and distinguished ones at that. We had difficulty in dragging H. B. from his comfortable corner, but we succeeded at last, and very funny he was.

I once met him in the Strand on a raw and gusty day. As we walked along together—I believe he had just handed over his tenancy of the Savoy Theatre, after which he never did act again—a foul and filthy cap was blown from the pate of a coalman into the street. Without a second's hesitation, H. B. darted into the midst of the traffic, rescued the cap, and restored it, with a smile, to the coalman.

He hadn't a scrap of "side" about him. There are certain actors, some young and others not so young, on the stage to-day who might model themselves on H. B. in respect of manners and deportment.

W. S. Penley I knew well at the Savage Club. He was just as amusing when eating a grilled sole as when playing "Charley's Aunt" or "The Private Secretary." After all, the large rolling eyes were the same, and the full tenor voice was the same. And when he became indignant, as he easily did, he was funnier still.

I once ventured to ask him if it was true that if anybody in his company got a laugh he cut it out.

"Good God!" cried Penley. "Of course it's true! Who do you think I run my something theatre for?"

Seymour Hicks had a cottage at Merstham for quite a time, and I also lived for a few years in that village. Hicks had not quite the right nature for village life. He used to come dashing up the quiet street in a big car, leap out before it had stopped, rush into the cottage with his arms full of presents for "Ella" and "Betty," embrace them, I am sure, with the most sincere affection, and be back in the car and on the way to London before anybody had had time to draw an even breath.

But he did once stay a fortnight at "The Old Forge," and I travelled up to London with him at the end of it.

"Are you," he asked me as soon as the train started, "in Merstham Society?"

I replied that, to the best of my belief, I was not.

"Neither am I," said he. "I'm not suited to the country. I take it too seriously. I had to send across the road only this morning and tell Mrs. Blank the smoke from her chimney was not going up straight."

It was a sweetly pretty place he had, and he honestly tried to like it. One of his ameliorating plans was to have a skittle-alley in the paddock at the end of the garden, and a small theatre for private shows. "You know," he explained. "The little old rag going up and down."

But he left instead.

Everybody loved and loves Ellaline Terriss. When the War broke out, I organised a concert at Merstham for the Prince of Wales's Fund, and persuaded Miss Terriss to sing. She sang, among other songs, "Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers," and made me lead the chorus.

When we had all sung it, she brought Betty down to the footlights, and Betty bravely sang the chorus all through by herself, and correctly, what is more. It was her first appearance on any stage. When she had finished, her mother said, "Well done, darling! Daddy bet me you'd break down, so he's lost!"

G. P. Huntley I first met when he had just taken London by storm in "Kitty Grey," but I did not get to know him well until I went to live at Hove, where he also had a house.

Huntley is one of those men who simply cannot help being funny. He is funny all the time. His outlook on life is funny. I have played billiards with him and golf, and he was funny at both. I think he was funnier at golf than at billiards. He had a partner who took the game very seriously. Huntley's ball was lying badly on the edge of a ditch, and, of course, in the rough. His partner, having carefully inspected the lie, gave Huntley a long lecture on the best way to play the shot, giving reasons for all his statements.

Huntley listened with grave attention, and then said : " Thank you very much. But, do you know, I think—I say I think—I'll just walk up to the ball—like this—and simply hit it—like this."

Which he did, and the ball flew well and truly for over a hundred yards.

Huntley was very interested in North American Indians, and collected souvenirs of these charming people. Another well-known actor also collected similar souvenirs. When the time came that this second actor passed over to a better and less rainy world, his widow wrote to G. P. as follows :

" Dear Mr. Huntley, Knowing of your interest in North American Indians, I am sending you, as a souvenir of my dear husband, some blankets which he obtained from that part of the world some years ago."

Huntley replied :

" Dear Mrs.—, Very many thanks for the blankets, which came to hand this morning. Unfortunately, however, all the moths had escaped, and most of their eggs were broken."

Huntley often received presents. He once had a real yacht *given* to him, and went with his wife and an

engineer to look over it. But that is far too long a story to tell here. Ask him about it.

In America they are very fond of the story about the friend who saw Huntley to his flat in London one Sunday evening.

“Goodnight, old man,” said the friend on the doorstep. “I’ll see you Monday.”

“Oh, no, you won’t,” retorted Huntley. “There isn’t going to be any Monday—no Monday at all. And,” he added, thoughtfully, “very little Tuesday.”

Huntley did me the honour of asking me to collaborate with him in writing his reminiscences.

“Here’s all the material,” he said, handing me a suit-case. “You’ll find I’ve made a good start.”

When I came to examine the suit-case, I found five copies of the first three pages of Chapter I. There were also fish-hooks, pipes, boot-laces, and a lot of correspondence about a shooting-box in Ireland. The responsibility of housing that suit-case was too great for me to bear.

Sir Arthur Pinero is not only our leading living dramatist; he is also a man of great and kindly heart. I once went to him in much trouble over a play of mine which was running in London. The manager in charge of it had infringed his contract in fifty-nine places (or it may have been more), and I thought I had better do something legal about it. So I asked Pinero if he would give evidence in my favour.

He strongly advised me not to go to law.

“Our business,” he said, “is never taken seriously in the Law Courts.”

Another remark he made was this :

“I’m supposed to be a very formidable person, but

if I get a failure it's always my fault, while if I get a success it's all to the credit of the actor."

He refused at first to give evidence for me, but later consented when I said, "This is Germany against Belgium, and you represent England in the matter." He then promised to appear for me, and what a witness he would have made! But the case was settled at the last minute.

The public lost a lot of entertainment by the settlement of that case. My cast was a very hot one. In addition to Pinero, I had Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells and Miss Horniman.

Wells said in a letter: "Of course I'll give evidence for you. I have only had one play produced, and then the gentleman who produced it cut out every joke he had never heard before."

That is why so many eminent men of letters in this country will have nothing to do with the theatre. Wells has every attribute for success as a dramatist, but never again! Meanwhile the managers wring their hands and talk about the dearth of plays.

Miss Horniman said to me in conversation over the same matter:

"When I have my London theatre, over the front entrance will be inscribed, 'In this theatre the author is top dog.'"

Bennett's consent was the most unselfish of all on account of the slight impediment in his speech. He said: "I shan't make a good witness, as you see, but I'll do my best for you." He had the *cause* at heart.

CHAPTER XVII

MORE THEATRICAL CELEBRITIES.

A STRANGE genius was Robb Harwood, who will be remembered, even by the younger generation, as Captain Hook in "Peter Pan." Robb Harwood was a member of the Savage Club, and his contributions to the Saturday night concerts were always one of the outstanding items.

He was very tall and very thin, with the face of the traditional tragic actor relieved by a smile of sardonic humour. Poor Robb never took anything seriously—neither himself nor his career. I do not mean to imply by this that he did not do his very best in a *part*; he did, but a little less sense of humour would have been a great help to him in his career as a whole.

He was a wonderful mimic, and some great actors do not care to be mimicked. It is never wise for an actor to mimic an actor-manager unless he is sure that the victim will laugh with the rest. I fancy that Robb lost many a part merely because he would not treat his overlords with all that reverence which is doubtless their due.

Robb had a favourite song about a tragic actor who was starving until he took to the 'alls as a comic; he then did "very well indeed." I suggested to him that in the concluding refrain he should drop the jubilant tone of the successful and well-fed comic, and suggest

to the audience that the iron had entered into the soul of the tragedian—that although he now ate well, and lodged well, and drank and smoked of the best, yet he realised that his life as an artist was a failure. Robb quickly took up the point, and the concluding lines of the sketch, done with a touch of world-weariness and a suspicion of a break in the voice, made all the difference. It used to bring the Savages to their feet with a clamour of applause. They knew the touch of the great artist.

I had the pleasure of supping with Marie Tempest and her husband, Graham Browne, on their return from their recent world tour. This brilliant actress told me extraordinary stories of conditions under which they had played in outlandish places. She will doubtless one day put them all into a book, and so I will not poach.

I think the best performance I ever saw her give was in a play called "The Truth," by Clyde Fitch. The odd thing about this play was that the first two acts were excellent, but after that the play went off into a story of maudlin sentimentality. It might have been written by two authors, but I suppose it was Fitch in two moods.

I suggested to Miss Tempest that she should revive this play, and get the third and fourth acts written up to the level of the first and second. There are plenty of young people who could do it for her. I still think the idea a sound one.

I suppose the first "real actress" I ever met was Miss Lilian Braithwaite. I had seen her act with the O.U.D.S., and immediately determined that some day I would get her to act in a play of mine. This was

accomplished sooner than I could possibly have hoped, for she actually appeared in the very first play I had presented at a regular theatre.

A man I knew when I first joined the *Sketch*—of course, we were all very young indeed in those days—was arranging a matinee on behalf of something or other at the Court Theatre. He asked me if I had a little one-act play which he could use in his programme.

I said I had. It was a duologue, and the title, “The Patent Love-Lock.” He read it and said it would do if I could get two well-known people to play it. Very daringly, I approached Miss Lilian Braithwaite, who graciously accepted the part. The man’s part was played by Oswald Yorke.

My excitement was intense. It was a rather swagger matinee, including Sarah Bernhardt: I had a frock-coat and waistcoat made for the occasion, and a pair of striped trousers. I also had new patent-leather boots, a new top-hat, and new gloves.

I was insufferably hot in all these things. The frock-coat, an elaborate affair, was lined with satin and padded. I can’t think why it was padded. Perhaps the tailor thought I was too thin. In five years I wore this coat not more than five times, and then sold it to a dealer for about a shilling. I never bought another.

The little piece went with faint ripples of laughter, and Latey subsequently printed it in full in the *Sketch*, with portraits of Miss Braithwaite and Mr. Yorke. During the afternoon a young Society girl came up to me and asked me to pay five shillings for a souvenir programme. I indignantly informed her that I was “part of the show.” Oh, youth!

Miss Lilian Braithwaite has always remained one of

my most treasured friends, and I had the pleasure of writing her a really good part—at any rate, she said it was one of the best she had ever had—in a full-length play.

Sir Alfred Butt I first met when he was assistant to old Charles Morton at the Palace Theatre. The Palace, in those days, was a sort of second home for me. I remember Sir Alfred taking me up to the doorkeeper at the front of the house one night, and saying to him, “ You will know this gentleman by sight when you see him. He is to be admitted at all times.”

Herman Finck was then director of music, Butt was the manager, and Thomas Miller, now the general manager for the Co-Optimists, was treasurer. I used to stroll in two or three evenings a week, and sometimes sat in the orchestra with Finck. This was an embarrassing position until you became accustomed to it. All the people in the stalls seemed so very near. But they never bothered about me. They were all looking at the stage. We popped in and out like rabbits, and the band never stopped playing.

I wrote a song with Finck which a lady sang at the Palace for about a week. Finck had written the music, and wanted some words to go with it. In order to indicate the number of syllables required he had filled in with “ O, O, O, O, O, O, O.” I kept these in, much to his amusement.

The song began :

“ Here’s a love-tale, short and blameless :
Both the parties shall be nameless.”

One evening, I was standing at the side of the stalls,

waiting to hear the song. The two end seats were occupied by a smart-looking man about town and a very pretty girl. When the lady singer got to the end of the lines I have quoted, I heard the man say to the girl, "Thank God for that, anyway."

Before the Palace became famous for revue, Butt tried a short revue which played about an hour. It was not very successful, and, as the author had been taken ill, he asked me to rewrite it.

We settled the terms in his office, and then went down to sit out the revue. When it was over, Butt turned to me and said, "Well, what do you advise?"

"I advise you," I said, "to take it off."

And so he did. It was an honest opinion, but not good business for myself, and not, perhaps, very tactful. Is tact or honesty the better policy?

It was Oscar Asche who suggested to me that I should make a play out of my little published story, "The Girl Who Couldn't Lie." He said that he and his wife, Miss Lily Brayton, had been reading it on a caravan tour, and enjoyed it very much. So I did make a play out of it, with results of which I will tell in their due order.

I once had the honour of appearing on the same stage with Oscar Asche and his company, though not in the same play. This was at the opening performance of the Public Hall at Henley-in-Arden, where my father, as I have recorded, was the vicar. The doctor—*cum*—high bailiff was a great friend of Asche's, and invited him to do a scene from "The Taming of the Shrew" at the opening show. He also asked me to do "Compromising Martha," which I did, taking a company down from London, which

included Lydia Rachel in her Haymarket part of the Neighbour. I played the Curate, Gertrude Robins was Monica, and Ada Harker, daughter of my old friend Joseph Harker, was Martha.

I was naturally very nervous at appearing in my "home town," and very nearly dried up. I had to open the play with Monica. I had just started on my first lines when I saw Oscar Asche facing me in the prompt corner, and regarding me with what looked like critical ferocity. I had last seen him gently sipping tea at the back, and his appearance was quite unexpected. However, all was well. He returned to his tea, and eventually with his company to London (it was really very good-natured of him to come so far to oblige his friend) : we stayed three days, and played to packed and enthusiastic audiences.

The late Joseph Harker, the famous scenic artist, was a very old friend of mine, and so is his son Phil, who was in partnership with his father. The Harkers kept open house on Sunday evenings, and when I lived in London I used to join with a zest in their impromptu entertainments. The "Grand Ballet of All Nations" was my first contribution, and I believe it has been revived occasionally. We walked solemnly round a large room with vases, coal-scuttles, and all sorts of decorations on our heads. Appropriate music was supplied by Ada Harker, and the total picture seemed to amuse the onlookers.

Henry Ainley is one of the most casual of men for a really distinguished actor. Off the stage, he seems to be totally devoid of any sense of his own importance, which is very refreshing to a mere author, who has been reminded by lesser actors than Ainley that after

all he is only the author, and consequently a person of very little account.

Ainley walks about the streets as though he had never been heard of outside Lewisham, and had not been endowed with one of the most glorious voices of two generations. He would just as soon travel third-class as first ; indeed, I doubt if he would discover the difference until the journey was nearly over.

One of the first London actors I ever saw was the late Harry Nicholls. This was at Drury Lane in a pantomime called, I think, "Cinderella." The cast included Dan Leno, Little Tich, Herbert Campbell, Harry Nicholls, the Griffiths Brothers, and Belle Bilton, who had recently become a member of the peerage.

Harry Nicholls and Herbert Campbell always played their scenes together, and I remember that they both came to the Prince's ball in lamp-shades. They were wonderfully funny as the Ugly Sisters.

Harry Nicholls was the sort of man who is beloved wherever he goes. He had the gentlest and the sweetest nature conceivable. I first met him on board the *Adriatic* coming home from America in 1911, and he was the prime favourite of the smoke-room.

CHAPTER XVIII

CELEBRITIES IN OTHER WALKS

IN an earlier chapter I have talked about C. B. Fry, and told how it was that he came to write for the *Captain*, out of which grew *C. B. Fry's Magazine*.

It was through Fry that I met "Ranji." Ranji—if he will forgive me for not inflicting inverted commas on the reader at every mention—had declared in a paper that he had given his last interview, and would never again be interviewed. In 1899, mind you!

This put me on my mettle, and I said to my brother: "How would you like an interview with Ranji for the *Captain*?"

He said I couldn't get one, but, if I did succeed, he would give the feature a star place and pay for it in proportion. So I went along to Lords, and sent a message to Fry to tell him what I wanted. Fry sent back a card on which he had written: "K. S. R. says he will be interviewed. He is batting at the nets."

Round I went to the nets, and there was Ranji giving a brilliant display of that wrist-work that made him the most beautiful bat of his day. I waited until he had finished his practice and then approached him with Fry's card. He told me to meet him in the pavilion at a certain hour.

At the time appointed I went to the pavilion, and

hung about to intercept Ranji. I must have waited for hours, but I caught him at last.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “I remember. Now, look here. Can you come to the Crystal Palace to-morrow? I shall have more time there.”

I agreed, and the next day saw me chasing Ranji all over the Crystal Palace. I caught him twice, but he was slippery as an eel. No interview did I get, though I hung about all day.

Then I had an inspiration. Somehow or other, I found out that he was staying at the Grosvenor Hotel. I got up early the next morning, and called at the Grosvenor about eight o’clock. I told the porter on duty that I had an appointment with Ranji, and he took my word for it and sent me up to the top of the hotel in the lift.

I knew the number of the room, so went boldly to the door and knocked.

“Come in!” called a voice.

I went in, and there was the famous Ranji in bed! He could escape me no longer. I stayed and talked with him a long time, while he drank his morning tea and read the sporting papers.

I wrote out my interview and took it along to the *Captain* office. We called it “Ranji Interviewed in Bed,” and it was the feature of the second number.

Gilbert Jessop, the mighty hitter and hurricane scorer, I have known for a good many years, but the strange thing is that I have never seen him play cricket. We used to meet at the Savage Club, and I always found him a most attractive personality, with a great sense of humour.

It was a standing joke between Jessop and myself

that I was supposed to know nothing whatever about cricket. He said to me once :

“ Do you ever go to a cricket match ? ”

“ Very seldom,” I replied.

“ Have you ever been to a place called Lords ? ”

“ Never.”

“ Do you know where it is ? ”

“ I have a vague idea.”

“ Well, if you ever feel that you would like to see a cricket-match, and I happen to be playing at Lords, come along there and I’ll do my best to fix you up.”

I took him at his word. And I chose a good match. It was England v. Australia. I paid my admission, went round to the Pavilion, and sent my name in to Jessop. Out he came.

“ Hullo ! ” he said. “ What in the world are you doing here ? ”

“ I’ve come to see the match,” I said. “ Who are you playing, by the way ? ”

“ America,” said Jessop, gravely.

And even then I did not see him bat. He was twelfth man.

It might be supposed that a man who has been Editor of the *Sketch*, dramatic critic of the *Daily Mail*, and an author of many books and plays, would have met all the literary celebrities in the country. But the fact is I am far too diffident to frequent the places where literary lions foregather. I have never in my life been to a literary breakfast, or a literary lunch, or a literary tea, or a literary dinner, or a literary “ at home.”

I have been a life member of the Authors’ Society for twenty-five years, but I have never ventured to

attend one of their meetings. I should be terrified of so many great people all gathered together in one room. I like authors individually, but I doubt if I should like them in a mass.

Whenever I have met a distinguished author, it has been by accident or on business.

H. G. Wells I met at the Reform Club, whither I was taken to lunch by John Lane, who was at that time my publisher. Wells came in with Sir Henry Dickens, K.C., and they sat at our table. I remember that the distinguished author ate lobster and drank white wine, which horrified Lane.

When I was introduced to Wells he immediately said : "I've read all your books."

"I won't cross-examine you on them," I replied.

The conversation turned to motor-cars. Somebody asked Wells what make of car he was then driving. He said, "Oh, the kind of car authors have." He made me laugh by saying of a certain publisher that he kept a fleet of cars to show how rich he was, but he never took any of them out because he was too mean.

I had a play running at the Vaudeville, and I asked Wells to come and see it. On the impulse of the moment I added, "You ought to come. You're mentioned in it."

This, of course, had no influence with Wells, but he came to see the play and sat in a box. I was in rather a fix, because he was not, as a matter of fact, mentioned in the play. Fortunately, the curtain-raiser was also mine and I was appearing in it. So I introduced a line about Wells into that, and the audience were good enough to laugh.

He afterwards wrote me a very charming letter

about the main play of the evening, which I shall not (on principle) quote. I know how dull it is to read letters written to other people.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll once invited me to lunch with him at the Devonshire Club. We lunched alone, and afterwards adjourned to a private room for coffee and cigars. The whole thing was a most serious affair, but it ended on a jocund note—jocund, I mean, from the Scottish point of view. Just as I was leaving he said, “ Ye’ll never have a great success with a book until ye kill a baby.”

During lunch he caught sight of a distant familiar figure, and an expression of annoyance—mock annoyance, of course—came over his face.

“ There’s Clement Shorter !” he exclaimed. “ And I distinctly told him not to come here to-day !”

Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins I met at Wellington House during the Great War. (I had met him on previous occasions, but he was always hedged in by adoring ladies.) He was on the literary staff of the Rt. Hon. C. F. G. Masterman, at the Ministry of Information, and so was I.

Anthony Hope was one of my boyish idols. He seemed to have been favoured by the gods far above ordinary mortals. He had a brilliant career at Oxford ; he was President of the Union ; his “ Dolly Dialogues ” swept the country ; his “ Prisoner of Zenda ” did the same ; and then had a long run at the St. James’s Theatre in play form. Not so long ago, by the way, I saw it as a film, produced by Rex Ingram. I think it the best story-film I have ever seen. But then it was always one of the best stories ever written.

Anthony Hope is a most delightful personality. He

was kindness itself to me at Wellington House, and congratulated me very warmly on my little book, "The Glory of Zeebrugge." He used to read everything before it went to press, and his marginal notes, as may be imagined, were illuminating and valuable. I was delighted when he received a knighthood.

I shall always be grateful to Mr. Masterman for rescuing me from an Air Force Depot, where I was wasting every hour of a tedious day, and setting me to work at my own job. Even at the Ministry of Information some little person kindly suggested that I should have charge of the warehouse, but Masterman soon put a stop to that.

At our first interview he told me that he had reviewed "The Smiths of Surbiton" for the *Daily News* when it first appeared, and had always taken an interest since in my work. The first thing he gave me to do was a pamphlet on the treatment of British prisoners during the first few months of the war. All the facts were contained in a Government White Paper, but they were dull reading in that official shape. I did my best to put them into narrative form, and called the pamphlet, "The Quality of Mercy." It made my blood boil, and I hope it had the same effect on other people in neutral countries.

Almost immediately after that came the Zeebrugge raid, and I was sent down to Dover, under the *aegis* of the Naval Intelligence Department to get the full story from the men who knew it best, namely, those leaders of the raid who had survived. "The Glory of Zeebrugge" was the result, and vast quantities of that little book were sold in this country, in America, and the Colonies—as they were then called. America

and Canada set up their own editions. All the profits on the sale, of course, went to my department, and so one man, at least, made money for the Government during the War.

After this Masterman told me to write up the magnificent work that was being done by all classes of civilians in this country. He said : " Nobody has any idea what all these people are really doing—the men in the mines, the deep-sea fishermen, the women felling timber, the women working on the land. Go everywhere ! See them all, and make a story that will live for all time ! "

I was well on with it when the end of the War came along, but the articles I wrote, together with the " Glory of Zeebrugge," are all included in my war-book, " An Author in Wonderland," a copy of which was graciously accepted by His Majesty the King, who caused a very kindly note to be sent to me about it.

I made Masterman laugh by telling him of an elderly lady, white-haired, who was engaged in chopping down trees somewhere near Tunbridge Wells. I was in charge of the forestry official for the district. As soon as she spotted us, this keen old lady came dashing up, a huge axe over her shoulder, and crying out in piteous beseeching tones, " Oh, Mr. Blank ! Oh, Mr. Blank ! Do let me fell an oak ! "

This, it seemed, was the highest possible honour.

There were a lot of very charming girls employed at this work—hard work, mind you. I asked the forewoman what they did in the evenings.

" Dance," she said.

" That must be delightful," I replied, " to take off

all those rough clothes and big boots, and get into silk stockings and dainty feminine clothes."

"But they do nothing of the sort," was the answer.
"They dance exactly as they are."

I have mentioned that Colonel Newnham-Davis wrote regularly for the *Sketch*. He had an interest in Le Touquet, and invited me to go over there with him for a week-end. The other members of the party were Alfred Watson, editor of the *Badminton Magazine*, and Algy Bastard, the famous gourmet. Newnham-Davis and Algy Bastard were the joint authors, you will remember, of that classic volume, "The Gourmet's Guide to Europe"—and a very delightfully written little book, too.

We took a morning boat to Boulogne. One of the other passengers was Haddon Chambers, author of "The Tyranny of Tears," possibly the best light comedy in our language. He was rather a sad person.

On arrival at Boulogne a meal was awaiting us, rather to my surprise, at the restaurant on the quay. I was still more surprised when they began to serve the meal. Lucullus must have struggled to get from his grave to join us.

Presently we were spotted by a travelled-looking person who had been worrying a quayside leg of chicken in a far corner. He came across to our table to say hullo. It was Harry de Windt.

His expression on sighting our table was alone sufficient reward for crossing the Channel.

"My lord! How *do* you do it?" he gasped.

"Oh," said Bastard, "I made a special trip across yesterday to order it." That was all.

Newnham-Davis had some interest in Romano's. I think he was a director. At any rate, he insisted that I should dine with him there.

Our fellow-diners were George R. Sims and Frank Boyd, editor of the *Pelican* and son of the famous "A.K.H.B." We had a corner table, and the dishes were brought along for Newnham-Davis's inspection before they were served. We all bowed to each dish. It was the least one could do.

The banquet finished with very old brandy out of very large glasses. The glasses were then presented to you as a souvenir ; I have mine now.

I lived in Craven Street in those days, and that night walked with Sims as far as Charing Cross. I then went home, mounted the stairs, undressed, got into bed, and laid my head on the pillow.

The room at once began to revolve with amazing rapidity. A few minutes later, that dinner might never have been.

I have known very few eminent statesmen, but I did once sit on a platform with the great Joseph Chamberlain. This was the more remarkable in that I was a schoolboy at the time.

The wonderful Joe, the idol of Birmingham, whose influence reached out over Henley-in-Arden and the Shakespeare country, was advertised to speak at the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon. I ached to hear him. So did my father, and many others. But I was the only one who heard him. And it happened in this way.

Taking a chance, as they say, I walked to Bearley station and bought a third-class ticket for Stratford-on-Avon. When the train came in—a Birmingham

train—I was thrilled to notice that it contained a Pullman car. (We called it a saloon in those days.) Seated in the Pullman was a clean-shaven gentleman with an orchid in his button-hole and a monocle in his eye! Joseph!

So we two travelled on to Stratford together—though not in the same saloon. Arrived at Stratford, the platform was covered with red baize and elderly gentlemen in top-hats and frock-coats. All this was not for me, so I nipped out of the station and ran like—anything—for the Memorial Theatre.

I had no ticket; of course, so the front entrance was a waste of time. Sneaking round the theatre, I saw some steps that seemed to lead to a cellar. I descended them, and found myself under the stage! A spiral stairway led upwards. I followed it, and suddenly appeared on the stage!

“Quick,” said an excited official. “He’s just coming! Sit down!”

I took the nearest vacant chair. It was not Chamberlain’s chair, but one very near it. And there I remained for the entire meeting, close to the great man, and faced by masses of enthusiastic, pink-faced Conservatives. I have been a Conservative ever since.

The illustrious name of Thomas Hardy on my list reminds me of an amusing adventure I had in company with that brilliant actor, Leslie Faber.

At one time, Leslie and I arranged to go into management together. He had adapted a play from the Danish—his father was Danish Consul in London—which he was anxious to produce, I had written a comedy in which Faber had great faith, and as a third string I suggested getting permission from Thomas

Hardy, if possible, to make a dramatic version of "The Trumpet Major."

We wanted a small theatre, and the one that seemed most likely was Terry's, in the Strand (now a picture-house). So one evening we went along to inspect Terry's. Forbes-Robertson was playing there in "The Passing of the Third-Floor Back"—a marvellously moving performance.

Leslie and I went over the theatre from floor to ceiling and back again. Of course, we had not even opened negotiations, but we decided on a new colour scheme and a re-arrangement of the seating. The front of the house staff, overawed by our air of possession, were extremely courteous. I think we assured the young lady who presided over the dress-circle bar that her services would be retained under our management, and possibly hinted at a slight increase of salary. I have never been so popular in a theatre before or since.

A few days after this, I saw an announcement in the press that the Dorchester players were presenting at the Corn Exchange, Dorchester, their own version of "The Trumpet Major." I immediately sought out Faber, and we set forth to Dorchester.

On the way we picked up Charles Pond, the well-known humorous reciter, who said he was going to Weymouth.

"Oh, nonsense!" we replied, and insisted on his coming to Dorchester instead, which indeed he did.

We had some difficulty in booking rooms, the town being uncommonly full. In the end, however, Pond secured a room at one hotel, and we got fixed up at another. We then dined, and went to see "The Trumpet Major." Hardy himself was not present.

They told us he had attended the dress-rehearsal, but was now ill in bed. We refrained from unkind comment. The work of the Dorchester Players is well known for its sincerity, and that inseparable and in-valuable flavour of Wessex.

When it was over, we all went to Pond's hotel for a night-cap. The bar-parlour was crowded with local worthies, and it suddenly occurred to me that they might like to hear Pond recite. So I stood up and thus addressed them :

“Gentlemen, I think you would like to know that, you have among you this evening the world's most distinguished reciter, Mr. Charles Pond, of London. Mr. Pond has just returned from a tour of Europe, during which tour he has had the honour to appear before the Emperor of Germany, the Czar of Russia, and all the other crowned heads. I am quite sure that, if you wished to hear him, Mr. Pond would be only too happy to give you a selection from his repertoire.”

This speech was received with loud applause. Pond at first modestly refused to recite, but presently stood up on a chair, and gave the company that famous sketch of his, “The Fully-Licensed Man.” (Which reminds me that I have a large illustration of this sketch, done by Hassall at the Savage Club whilst Pond recited. Ivimey was at the piano playing popular Cockney airs. A good combination, I think, and as Chairman I was proud of it.)

“The Fully-Licensed Man” went magnificently at Dorchester, and an encore was inevitable. Closing-time was at hand, but that didn't matter because all the legal authorities were with us. The doors were shut, and Pond went through his entire repertoire,

all the time mounted on the chair. Just as the company rose to seek their beds, he started again and did it all in French.

I think it was about three or four in the morning when he finished. I know we had had a splendid entertainment, and so had the men of Dorchester. But it was now time to go to bed.

Refusing Pond's generous offer of supper, we found our own hotel and rang the bell. There was no answer. We rang again. Still no answer. We knocked and rang. Still no answer. We then kicked at the door. Not a light showed or a blind stirred. We retired to the other side of the road, ran swiftly back again, and threw ourselves, feet first, at the door.

There was no reply. Our bags were in the hotel. It seemed hard, but we had to leave them there and seek shelter elsewhere. Yes, but where? I suggested the railway-station, and we were on our way there when it suddenly occurred to me to ring the bell of a quiet-looking inn we were passing.

Almost immediately the door was opened, and a gentleman, fully dressed, stood in the doorway. (It was now between four and five in the morning, it should be remembered.)

“Yes, gentlemen?” said he. “What can I do for you?”

“Have you a couple of vacant bedrooms?” I asked.

“Certainly. Walk in, please.”

We walked in, went upstairs, and went to bed. To this day I have never understood what that suave person was doing in full morning kit at that dead hour of the night.

The next morning, I called at Max Gate, Mr.

Thomas Hardy's residence, to pay my respects. Max Gate is a pleasant, old-fashioned house some little way out of the town, and in a quiet spot.

I was distressed to learn that the great novelist was confined to his room with influenza. He wrote me a few days later, expressing his regret, and also informing me that, in his opinion, the time was not ripe for a production of "The Trumpet Major" in London.

The joint management fell through, not for that reason, but for another, with which neither Faber nor myself had anything to do. We have always remained the best of friends, and I shall refer to him again when I come to my chapter on "Plays."

Colonel Mackenzie Rogan, late senior Bandmaster of the Brigade of Guards, is a very old friend of mine. He is a very big man, and when in full kit, with bearskin, the effect is overpowering.

He once got me a ticket for St. Paul's Cathedral for the ceremony always held on St. George's Day. I was in the organ-loft, where I had a wonderful view of the King, the Queen, the young Princes, and the brilliant congregation. Rogan and his band came marching up the Cathedral playing, "Onward, Christian Soldiers." When they arrived at the chancel they stopped playing, and the choir and organ took up the hymn. The band assembled behind the altar, and then we had a combination of the band, the organ, and the choir in this great hymn. It was an experience I have never forgotten, and am not likely to forget.

Rogan had asked me to wait for him after the service. I did so, and we walked down Ludgate Hill, crowded with sightseers, together. I am six-foot-two, but I felt like a dwarf beside Rogan in his bearskin.

However, it didn't matter. Nobody had a glance for the mere man in mufti.

No so long ago, Rogan came down to Hove and invited me to lunch with him at the "Old Ship." I saw he had something on his mind, and it came out after lunch.

"Well," he said, "my book has been accepted by a publisher, and all I want now is a title—a very important thing."

"'Fifty Years of Army Music,'" I said, and that is the title of his book. I have just finished reading it, and enjoyed every page.

The late Sir Arthur Pearson was a man for whom everybody had the greatest affection and respect. I knew him slightly before he went blind. We met in connection with the Fresh Air Fund, that admirable charity of Sir Arthur's.

His amazing independence despite his great affliction is well known. On one occasion he was with a friend in London, and was about to cross the street when the friend said, "Wait a minute. There's a cart coming."

Pearson went straight on, passed behind the cart, and gained the opposite pavement in safety.

"Wasn't that rather rash?" asked his friend.

"Not a bit," said Pearson. "That was a coal-cart. I knew it by the smell. You don't suppose I've forgotten the length of a coal-cart, do you?"

It was his idea, I believe, to utilise the pillar-boxes during the War as advertising stations for the Prince of Wales' Fund posters. Permission having been obtained, Pearson went out with the printer and the bill-sticker to start the good work.

"How many posters are you putting on each pillar-box?" enquired Pearson.

"One," said the printer.

"I think you'll find each pillar-box will just carry two posters," said Pearson. They tried, and he was right.

Pett Ridge is an old friend of mine, and a very charming man. Years ago, in the days when I used to attend club dinners, I heard him tell a very neat little after-dinner story in that laconic, quiet manner that diners-out in London know so well. It was quite short, as all the best stories are. (Was it not Lord Chesterfield who advised his son never to tell a story in public, but, if he did, to keep it very short? Why is it that bores are always so long-winded? How delightful it would be to come across a short-winded bore!)

A little girl was walking down a street with her mother. They came to a portion of roadway which was covered with straw.

"Mummy," she said, "why is all that straw in the road?"

"Well," replied the mother, "the angels brought Mrs. Jones a little baby last night."

"H'm," observed the small girl. "It must have been very carefully packed."

Pett Ridge always smokes a pipe at public dinners—or did. He says it is to show that he is "one of the people." I don't know about that, but I do know that he is one of the best.

S. H. Sime, the artist, is a strangely brilliant person and a brilliantly strange person. He once brought me a drawing which, he said, had been refused by every

editor in London. He expected that I, too, would refuse it.

The picture shows an aged gentleman of affairs—what we should in these days call a profiteer—mounting a flight of marble steps. (Sime is very fond of flights of steps.) Immediately in front of him is a small opening—a half-circle just about large enough for a weasel to creep through.

To his left is a high wall, surmounted by iron spikes, and beyond that great clouds of sulphur.

I not only bought it, but I put it in the Christmas Number, and called it, “The Gate of Heaven.” Somebody bought the original for a good price, which went to Sime.

Raven-Hill of *Punch* is one of the cheeriest artists in London. We once planned to go together on a caravan tour, after which I was to write a book and he would illustrate it. The tour fell through, but we did the book all the same. It ran serially through *Cassell's Magazine*, and was afterwards published by Cassells.

May I be permitted one line of swank? When our present King was Prince of Wales, he made, as all the world knows, a tour of the world. His private suite on board ship contained a private library, and the list of the books selected was published. Three modern English authors were represented—Anthony Hope, Stanley Weyman, and my lack-lustre self. My book was “The Happy Vanners,” of which I have just been speaking. Probably the Royal attention was attracted by the illustrations, which were excellent.

We followed, in this case, a somewhat unusual course. Cassells rather kicked at Raven-Hill's terms, so I paid him for his pictures and then sold the com-

plete work to the publishers. When the book had been published, I claimed the original drawings, which, of course, were my property, and got them. They now adorn my walls.

There are many other celebrities of whom I should like to write, but I suppose the story of my own journeys must continue. I find that I have jotted down such names as Sousa, Robert Hichens, Dame Clara Butt, Yeend King, Sir George Frampton, Israel Zangwill, and last, but not least, St. John Adcock, Editor of the *Bookman*, and almost the only critic with whom I have a personal acquaintance. And him I have not seen for fifteen or twenty years.

There are other friends whom I have forgotten at the moment, but whose names will occur to me when it is too late to include them in my book. May I suggest to them to write the story of their own lives and forget to include me?

CHAPTER XIX

FAREWELL TO FLEET STREET

I HAVE mentioned that Lord Northcliffe did not like his dramatic critics to produce plays. There was nothing in my contract about it—indeed, I never had a contract with the *Daily Mail*—but it was understood.

Towards the end of 1907, Miss Lena Ashwell took over Penley's Theatre in Great Queen Street, renamed it the Kingsway Theatre, and prepared to start in management for herself, with Norman McKinnel as producer and leading man

The opening play was to be “Irene Wycherley,” and they were looking for a second string to their bow. McKinnel, whom I had known for some years at the Savage Club, asked me if I had a play that would suit Lena Ashwell. I said I had not, but I had a play that would suit him, by which I meant that the principal character in the play was a man. McKinnel said Miss Ashwell did not mind playing a secondary part so long as the play was a good one. He came up to my rooms in Craven Street, therefore, and I read him a play in four acts called, “The Whip Hand.”

McKinnel liked the play very much, and went off with it in his pocket. A few days later, I had a letter from Mr. J. D. Langton, Miss Ashwell's solicitor, asking me to call upon him to arrange details of the

contract. This was soon done, and my play was definitely fixed to follow "Irene Wycherley" at the Kingsway.

I at once sent in my resignation to the Editor of the *Daily Mail*, explaining the reason. The resignation was accepted with expressions of regret. It was so unusual for anybody to resign from the *Daily Mail* that all Fleet Street believed I had been "fired." But I still have the letter which indicates the contrary.

And now followed a complication which was very awkward for me, and yet I could not explain the difficulty of my position, nor have I ever done so until this moment. I was asked by the Editor of the *Daily Mail* not to announce the fact of my resignation ; he knew, I suppose, that he would be snowed under with applications for the job. Naturally, I gave the required promise.

Shortly after that, I received an invitation to attend a meeting of all the dramatic critics who watch London first-nights. The meeting was to be held at the *Tribune* office, and the notion was to form a Society of dramatic critics to protect their interests and for the purposes of social amenities. The result of that meeting was the Critics' Circle, which still flourishes.

I was in a fix. On the one hand, I had pledged myself to Miss Ashwell not to reveal the fact that she had a play of mine accepted ; on the other hand, I had promised the Editor of the *Mail* not to let anybody know that I had resigned. If I stayed away from the meeting it would look like disloyalty to my colleagues ; if I went to the meeting, I could not honestly join the Society.

In the end, I decided to attend the meeting merely as

an onlooker. It was not a very lively affair, but at least one good remark was made. Somebody objected that the difficulty of forming the projected Society lay in the fact that there was no precedent, no foundation, nothing to build on.

Mr. J. T. Grein swept aside this objection.

“I would remind the speaker,” he said, “that God made the world out of nothing.”

Upon which the late Charles Palmer sprang up and said, “Yes, but, after all, He was God.”

There was a great shout of laughter.

When it came to a show of hands in favour of the Society being established, I voted neither for nor against. As I expected, this attitude was misunderstood, and I was afterwards attacked about it. Somebody kindly suggested that I was aggrieved at not being put on the Committee! Of all things in this world I hate committees the most. Only once in my life have I consented to serve on a committee, and then I was so impatient at the slow conduct of business—at any rate, it seemed slow to me—that I was utterly useless, and have never served on a committee of any sort or kind since.

In honour bound, I did not explain. Nor did Miss Ashwell do my play after all. She found another with a much better part for herself, and her backers wisely pointed out that she was the star and was expected to play the star part. So my play came back after the usual twelve months. Its subsequent history—by no means unamusing—I will relate in the right chapter.

I had said farewell to Fleet Street. But it was something of an actor’s farewell, for I twice returned. The first occasion was when Fletcher Robinson, who had

been editing the *World*, suddenly died. This paper had passed into the possession of Lord Northcliffe, and he offered me the editorship. He said one reason was that I was the only man who had not applied for it ; but that, of course, was his playful exaggeration.

I felt very proud at the idea of editing the *World*, but very doubtful as to the financial benefits to be earned. My agreement ran that I was to have ten pounds a week, payment at the usual rates for all contributions and ten per cent. of the profits. The paper had fallen very low financially, but if, with the help of the Northcliffe millions and the Northcliffe publicity, I could make it boom once again, I stood to do very well.

Alas, I soon perceived that this radiant hope would never be realised. The thing had become hidebound. Try as I would, I could not infuse a fresh spirit into it. The type was not to be changed, and the contributors were not to be changed, and the spirit of the paper was not to be changed. All was to go on as before, and yet I had somehow to work a miracle.

Those were depressing weeks. Lord Northcliffe was away on the Continent, and I had no real authority over the small but permanent staff. What was worse, I had no money to spend. The rates of pay were very low, and even so the paper was making a small loss each week.

I tried the effect of my own pen, which, incidentally, was worth more to me outside the office of the *World* than in it. I wrote a bitter attack on compulsory cricket for small boys at private schools, pointing out that some boys could play cricket and some could not, and that it was shameful to compel boys to waste all the

lovely days of summer in playing cricket who had not, and never would have, the slightest aptitude for the game.

It was a good article, I venture to say, and the idea was sound. (It has cropped up since.) But the school-masters were enraged. I think we sent a copy to every headmaster of a private school in this country, and they all wrote stinging replies, which I printed in the paper. That was the kind of thing the *World* wanted—but I got little support.

I used to sit in Edmund Yates's chair, mournfully interviewing the old *World* staff, and longing for the buzz of the machinery and the life and bustle and prosperity of the *Sketch* office. A success could have been made of the *World* even at that date, but not under the conditions existing. So when the preliminary three months for which I had contracted were up, I thankfully put on my hat and walked away from York Street.

My other return to Fleet Street was purely temporary. Mr. Lindsay Bashford, who "edited" the *Daily Mail* Fourth Page articles and correspondence, went abroad on holiday, and I was invited to fill his chair until he returned. Once again I felt my impotence. I had been accustomed to complete independence, but here, of course, there was no such thing. When I picked up the paper in the morning, I never expected to find my columns as I had left them the previous evening.

Besides, I had acquired a home in the country, and was busy with books, stories, articles, plays, and sketches. It is a fascinating life, the life of Fleet Street, but it is a whole-time job. No man can expect to com-

bine successfully the professions of journalist and author. If you want to write books and plays, keep clear of Fleet Street. If you want to live continually in the very heart of the great machine of London, if you want to see the machine wound up daily and find out exactly what it is that makes the wheels go round, and do your own bit towards making them go round, then say good-bye to your books and your plays and give yourself, body and mind, to Fleet Street.

Some years later I had an offer that would have filled me with delight in my early days. It was to join the staff of a leading daily paper and edit a couple of columns devoted to the lighter doings of London and the world at large. It was the kind of thing, I think, that I could have done pretty well, but it meant daily attendance at the office, and a salary no better than the one I had given up many years earlier. So, with regrets—real regrets, for I honestly love the life of Fleet Street—I declined it.

Although I never again had an editorial or staff job in Fleet Street, I was destined to be connected for two years with daily journalism. This happened when Mr. J. L. Garvin took over the editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

He wrote to me and suggested that I should call upon him at his office. I went, and met a tall, lean man with an astounding pair of eyes and a vocabulary that suggested that he was always speaking for publication.

His first question was rather a strange one.

“Have you ever,” he said, “put your finger on the button and heard the bell ring?”

“Yes, often,” I replied, modestly.

I don't know to this day if that was the right answer, but it seemed to me that a man who had reached the age of five-and-thirty without ever making the bell ring must be too much of a duffer to be of any use to the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

He went on to explain that he wanted me to write a column of dialogues once a week. They could be on any subject I cared to choose so long as I avoided politics. I suggested that I should take each week the outstanding non-political theme of the moment, and discuss it from the points of view of the upper ten, the middle classes, and the lower five—three little dialogues in all.

Garvin liked the idea, and I did these dialogues every Monday for two years. They have also served the turn (with my permission, of course) of the British Broadcasting Company, and the main idea has been useful to several writers of revues.

Sometimes my dialogues were a little provocative. I remember writing one on "Forcible Feeding," at the time when the papers were full of the tortures endured by Suffragettes who went on hunger strike. I had talked the matter over with a doctor, and he assured me that nasal feeding did not involve any pain if the patient refrained from resistance.

I brought all this out in my dialogues, and Garvin gave me the *Pall Mall* contents-bill to myself. I was quite startled to meet my name in letters a foot high all over London and the suburbs.

The Suffragettes were furious, and dared me to be forcibly fed myself. I replied, in a letter to the Editor of the *P.M.G.*, that I would go to prison for a fortnight and be fed through the nose by Sir Victor Horsley, if

at the end of my imprisonment they would swear off militant tactics for ever. It was a sporting offer, I think, and I was quite serious in making it. But there was no reply. The Suffragettes went on chaining themselves to railings and biting policemen until the Great War came along and swamped all minor disputes.

Garvin was a good man to work for in that he never stinted his encouragement. Too many editors are afraid to praise their contributors in case the contributors get swelled head and demand more money. And there may be other reasons. I think this a mistake. A journalist of experience knows pretty well the cash value of his work to any paper for which he writes, and he usually knows what that paper can afford to pay. I certainly thought my dialogues were worth more than Garvin paid me for them ; at the same time, I had a notion that the paper was not making a fortune, and was content to bide my time.

I do think, also, that an editor should feel grateful to a man who has served him well in the past, and not allow him to be contemptuously treated in the matter of critiques and reviews. It is quite impossible for a writer to be a "wonderful thing, loved by all classes" at one moment, and a concocter of "utter piffle without a word of sense in it" at the next.

Anyway, the *Pall Mall* was a great little paper in those days, and I am glad to have been a humble member of a very brilliant staff.

CHAPTER XX

PLAYS

I NOW come to a chapter which will require all the tact that I may possess. And yet one must not be selfish. As I have before observed, a book of this sort is mere idling unless it is of help to those who are following, or who are about to follow, in the paths trodden by the writer. Without being priggish, it is surely permissible to wish to help the younger members of one's own craft.

I think the net results of my experiences in the theatre as an author would be these :

- (1) If you want to lead a tranquil life, don't write plays.
- (2) If you want to make a lot of money with very little work, don't write plays. Deal in stocks and shares. It is much safer.
- (3) If you have a passionate love for the art of the theatre, don't write plays for the general public.
- (4) If you have got a hide like leather, write plays.
- (5) If you don't care a dump what sort of work is handed over the footlights in your name, write plays.
- (6) If your conscience allows you to steal other men's brains, write plays as fast as you can. It is impossible to fail if you are content to do what has been done, and successfully done, before you came on the scene.

Any dramatist of experience in this country would, if he told the square truth, subscribe to these axioms. There is one way, and only one, for the man of originality and independent mind to be happy as an author in the theatre. He must have a large fortune and own his theatre.

Enter the theatre as a mere author, with no financial stake in the play, and no hold over the company or the staff, and you must be a great man indeed—which means in theatreland a prolific earner of money—if you want to be treated as anything but a nuisance and an interloper. Mind you, here you will find a manager with charm, tact, and understanding ; there you will find loyal, sympathetic, and unselfish players. Speaking generally, however, the author of the play is at a complete disadvantage in the theatre which hopes to make money out of his brains, and managers and players there be who will take advantage of his disadvantage, and rejoice in his discomfiture.

Those are general remarks, written for the benefit of young writers who read in the papers of the fictitious sums earned by successful playwrights. Believe me, there is not so much money in writing even the most successful of plays. Only the other day the fortunes of successful playwrights of the past were printed ; there was not one at which a successful man of business in any line would not have turned up his nose in contempt. And these were the very few who wrote successful plays all their lives. One such dramatist may occur in each generation, and even he would probably have made ten times the amount, and with far less heart-burning and worry and unpleasantness, in selling beer or silk stockings.

My general remarks are not to be applied to specific experiences of my own. I have had my little successes as a dramatist, and I have seen winners which I had created turned into losers by short-sighted managers. But I never spend one unhappy moment in grieving over the past. The theatre is a great deal to you if you happen to be a man of the theatre, but it is far from being all. There are many other fields for your activity.

In a word, I would say to any young author who is born an Englishman : " Write plays if you must, but do not write them to make a fortune, or look upon the theatre as your main prop. An occasional successful play should be the jam on your workaday bread-and-butter."

I have already written about my earliest efforts as a dramatist. I will now show the reader how easily a good play—an admittedly good play—may be overlooked by London managers, and never enjoy the glory of a successful West End run. These instances are really interesting in view of the foolish statement, constantly repeated, that there are no good plays seeking production in vain.

In 1907, when my little one-act play, "Compromising Martha," was still having an astonishing success at the Haymarket, Mr. Frederick Harrison sent for me and asked me if I had a full-length comedy which would fit his present company—that is to say, Charles Hawtrey, Weedon Grossmith, Fanny Brough, Henry Kemble, and others.

I said I had, having written a comedy round those very players. He made an appointment in his rooms and I read him the play. Harrison liked it, and frankly said so.

"I wonder," he added, "what Hawtrey will think of it? Would you mind Hawtrey reading it?"

"Not a bit," I replied, "but the Weedon Grossmith part is the better of the two. That character simply ran away with the play, and I couldn't stop the fellow. Still, the Hawtrey part is also a good one."

"We'll see what he says," agreed Harrison. "Kemble will like his part, and so will Miss Brough."

So Hawtrey read the play and turned it down. I was disappointed, naturally, for a success at the Haymarket would have meant the world to me at that point of my career. But I could not be surprised.

I changed the title to "The Cheerful Knave," thus going all out for the character most likely to appeal to an actor-manager. We then had a try-out at the Theatre Royal, Margate, with George Elton as the Knave and Florence Haydon in the *grande dame* part. Elton gave a wonderful show, and the piece was entirely successful. But no managers of importance came from London to see it, so I next had to get it done in London.

I borrowed a theatre for the afternoon, and engaged a company at nominal salaries. Elton played his old part, Leslie Faber was in the Hawtrey part, Marie Illington replaced Florence Haydon, and Christine Silver played the girl. My old friend Agnes Thomas, that excellent actress, was also in the cast.

All promised well, and all the seats were taken up. Many prominent managers had promised to attend. And then, on the very night before we were to produce, came the sad death of King Edward.

I found the company in a state of profound gloom. All the ladies were in deep black, and how any comedy

could survive this picture I failed to see. But we had a rehearsal, and then broke up to wait on events.

All the theatres, of course, were closed. In the meantime, I got Mr. Vedrenne interested in the play. He promised to attend the postponed matinee, and to bring Sir Charles Wyndham. Sir Charles was looking for a summer attraction at the Criterion.

Alas ! A deputation of managers at the Guildhall or somewhere was arranged for that very afternoon, and Sir Charles was asked to head it. He felt bound to accept, and eventually arrived at my matinee when we were in the middle of the second act. Asked his opinion at the end of the play, he said the plot was incomprehensible !

I had many letters congratulating me on the play, and my friends came forward with offers of money to put it up for a run. But I would not have that. I may be squeamish, but I have never allowed any of my friends to risk their money backing any venture of mine. If the play was not good enough for the regular managers, let it go.

And now the most astounding thing happened. The amateurs got hold of it and began playing it all over the country. Nothing could stop them. They revelled in the play. The parts fitted them like gloves, and all made successes. And the repertory companies also took it up. Miss Horniman did it at Manchester, and yet it was not in the least high-brow. So, up to date, ends the story of "The Cheerful Knave"—save that I made a novel out of it which ran through many editions and is by no means done with yet.

The life-story of "The Whip Hand" was even more peculiar. Here was a play that aroused enthusiasm in

the breasts of many managers, and was applauded by the public, yet has never been tried at a West-end theatre.

I wrote it about the same time as "The Cheerful Knave." This was the play accepted by Miss Lena Ashwell for production at the Kingsway. She never did it, so I sent it to a well-known actor-manager. He rang me up and desired to see me at once. (Let all young authors read carefully my experiences with this play. They will learn, I hope, never to set store by the enthusiasm of managers over a play in manuscript.)

This manager clenched his fist and banged on the table.

"My God!" he cried. "I'll have all London talking about this play! I must arrange at once for the copyright performance!"

A bill was printed and exhibited outside his theatre. I and a friend read the parts on the stage. A guinea was paid for admission at the box-office. Thus the play was made copyright.

The actor-manager never did it. So I did it myself at the Croydon Repertory Theatre. Eilie Norwood and Madge McIntosh played the leading parts and played them very well. The public paid to see the play. Success was in the air. Louis Meyer came down and bought an option on it for twelve months. He at that time had the Garrick and the Strand theatres.

A few months elapsed and then one night he rang me up at my house at Merstham.

"That you, Howard? I'm going to put your play up at the Garrick immediately. Allan Aynesworth and Phyllis Neilson-Terry in the leading parts, and I would like your wife to play the part she played at

Croydon. Can you come up to-morrow morning and meet me and Aynesworth at the Garrick? There are just a few cuts to make, and we must decide on the cast at once."

Fortune! Clearly, a fortune at last! At a theatre like that and with a cast like that, the play could not fail. I had watched it in action every night for a week, and I knew the pull it had. And the Garrick! What luck! I had always wanted to have a play done at the Garrick. Oddly enough, that was the very theatre in which the copyright performance had taken place.

I went up and met Allan Aynesworth for the first time. I knew what he would want—little tonings down in the dialogue to make it more "Westendy." I agreed. We settled our business in half-an-hour, and then proceeded to engage the cast.

It was a good cast. Frances Ivor was one, Athole Stewart another, and so on all through. I was sent to the Royalty to see a certain young actress Louis Meyer fancied for a minor role. I returned to the Garrick with a favourable report, but he had gone off to the Strand. I rang him up at the Strand and told him the young actress would do very well.

"Righto," he said, rather coldly.

"Shall I come along and see you?" I asked.

"No, old man. Don't bother."

"Shall I come up to-morrow?"

"No, old man. I'll ring you up when I want you."

I smelt a rat. I went along to the Strand and asked for Meyer. He was engaged. I said I would wait. That brought him down. The little man was very troubled.

"Something's wrong," I said.

"Yes," he admitted. "I can't do your play after all. At least, not yet. I want to do it. I believe in it. I mean to do it, but not yet. To tell you the truth, I've had a business disagreement with Aynesworth."

He never did it. He renewed his option twice, thus showing his belief in the play, but he never produced it. He died. The doctors had warned him to take things quietly, but he could not do that. He had to rush about and run two theatres and a weekly paper. He paid the penalty, and my play never saw the light. It was a fairly serious play, and one of the best things I ever wrote in my life. Everybody liked it but nobody ever produced it. Let the optimistic young dramatist chew well on that story.

Now for some full-length plays that *were* produced in London. The histories of these will make the reader laugh.

The first was called, "The Girl Who Couldn't Lie." I adapted it from a little book of mine of the same name at the suggestion of Oscar Asche. It was about a girl, a member of a rather large middle-class family in a provincial town, who determined to tell the literal truth on all occasions. I described the play as an "eccentric comedy."

Bear in mind, please, that this was before the days of "The Naked Truth," "Nothing But the Truth," and all the other truth-telling plays. I mean the publication of my little book. Gilbert had written, "The Palace of Truth" many years before that, but I had never seen it or read it, and I think the play had been forgotten.

These are the coincidences of the theatre. I sent my play to Mr. Vedrenne and he said he would do it at a

series of matinees, but he did not like plays in four acts. Could I make it into three? This change had important results for many people.

My third act was in four scenes. Having told the truth to her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters, her wealthy uncle, and all kind friends who came to the house, Pauline went forth into the world waving her banner, and her adventures in the great world were conveyed in these four scenes. In the last act I brought her home to the family. She has learnt wisdom—worldly wisdom—and finished the play by telling a whacking white lie to her fiance about his voice.

Vedrenne wanted the play to be in three acts. So I went for a walk—my invariable custom when temporarily stumped for an idea. About a mile from home the idea came to me. I would make the fourth act the third act, and run my third-act scenes through the last act. That is to say, we should see the family assembled in the parlour, amusing themselves as such families do on a winter's evening. They would be talking about Pauline, and suddenly, on a certain cue, the whole of the front portion of the stage would be plunged into darkness, and on an inner stage at the back Pauline would be shown in her various employments. At the end of each little scene, back we should come to the family, who would take up their dialogue exactly where they had stopped.

I have described this idea of mine at some length because it brought about a radical change in the method of playwriting. It was absolutely the first time it had been done on the stage, but I was not to reap the benefits of my idea. The pioneer never does.

I had the satisfaction of seeing others make fortunes out of it.

Whilst I was altering my play in this manner for Mr. Vedrenne, out came “The Naked Truth” at Wyndham’s, with Charles Hawtrey in the leading part. A coincidence, of course, but a bitter one for me, Vedrenne promptly turned down my play. I cannot tell you what he said, but it was not the fault of my play.

Eventually it was done for the first time at the Glasgow Repertory. The theatre had not been doing at all well—in fact, it was about to close down. We opened to about £19. On the second night, on approaching the theatre from my rooms, I was astounded to see a queue reaching half-way up the street. I thought it must be a soup-kitchen. But it wasn’t. It was the pit-queue for “The Girl Who Couldn’t Lie.”

We played to £600 in all, and I was delighted to have a letter from the managing director in which he informed me that a full half of this sum was clear profit to the theatre. Down came the notice to terminate the season, and shortly afterwards my other play, “The Cheerful Knave,” was put up for a week and did quite reasonably well.

No managers came from London to see “The Girl Who Couldn’t Lie”—they never do. They don’t really want plays. It’s only their fun when they talk about the scarcity of plays. There is no scarcity. There is a glut. There must be.

The summer season was now setting in with great severity, and His Majesty George V was about to be crowned King. In these circumstances, it was only

fitting that I should get my first chance in London with a full-length play.

I got it. I entered into a partnership with Sir Charles Wyndham and Miss Mary Moore to produce the play at the Criterion. My share of the capital came out of my savings. Nobody else put in a penny, nor did I ask anyone to do so.

The weather was grilling. The Coronation was over. The London season was over. People were rushing away from London as fast as trains and motor-cars could carry them. It was a splendid chance for a success at a fashionable theatre !

We could not get the “ transparency ” to work neatly, and this caused two or three postponements. At last we opened to a languid house on the hottest night of the year. I remember that one critic, sitting in the front row of the stalls, fanned himself with his programme throughout the entire evening. That helped enormously, and I have never ceased to remember him in my prayers.

It was all great fun. There was no booing. I suppose the people were too hot to boo. Somebody called for the author, and Sir Charles insisted that I should appear in front of the curtain. I did so, and a friend said my manner was indolent and indifferent. This was wrong of me. I should have been very spry. I had lost my money, my play was ruined, and I had shingles in the head. Just the time to come out strong.

The notices frightened everybody except myself. I knew what to expect. They hit me all over the body, and did not even spare my shingled head. I suppose they were the worst notices any quite novel play had

ever received, and we all know the danger of novelty.

But an American gentleman got away with the goods. He wrote to his paper that this poor English guy and boob had hit upon the best and most ingenious idea ever seen in a London theatre, and he then described my scenes within a scene. That did it. They lapped up that idea like kittens, and they wrote plays round it, and they sent them to London, and Londoners said the Americans were the cleverest fellows on the surface of the globe.

As for the truth-telling joke, that was everybody's property. Fortunes were made out of it. My friends used to come to me and say, "Have you seen So-and-So at the So-and-So? It's very like your play, and the house is packed at every show."

I went golfing. I also took my play on tour, but with that adventure I will deal when I come to narrate my experiences as an actor.

After that terrible summer, things were pretty good in the theatre for a time, and so no play of mine was produced. I busied myself with the Croydon Repertory—of which the story in its place—and eventually the Great War burst upon the world.

Here, of course, was the very moment for my next play, which was produced in 1915, the worst time the theatres had ever known. Zeppelins were floating quite low down over the theatres, waiting for the pit-queue to form up. It never did form up in 1915. The pit people stayed at home or made munitions or went to France. As for the stalls and boxes and dress-circle, people could not be forced into those parts of the house even when they were drugged.

I had written a comedy in three acts called, "Forked

Lightning.” A London actor-manager selected this grand time to produce it. We tried it out first of all in Edinburgh, and it went so well in that critical city that the established play in the bill was cancelled and mine held the field for the remainder of the week.

We then came to London and opened at the Vaudeville. I don’t think there was an air-raid that night. The play went quite well, and the critics let me off very lightly. I took a call, again at the urgent request of the manager. (I can’t think why they want authors to exhibit themselves in the flesh. It must injure the business.)

We had changed the name of the play from “Forked Lightning” to “The Green Flag.” The notion was that ladies would be afraid of forked lightning. They were rather frightened of the green flag, thinking we were offering a drama on Irish politics, and that the theatre would be pulled down over their heads. So we moved from the Vaudeville to my old home, the Criterion.

Business was better. The Criterion is safer than most theatres during an air-raid, being underground. I think we might have done well had not the leading actor suddenly remembered—at least, it was the first I had heard of them—certain one-night engagements in Cornwall. Off he went, and this so depressed the acting-manager that he cut my name out of the newspaper advertisements and generally saved advertising expenses. The public apparently got the notion that we did not ourselves believe in the play. The public is always very foolish in such matters. We “came off.”

Miss Horniman did this play in Manchester. I believe it was well liked, and I am sure it was well acted.

After 1915 the theatres did very well indeed, and so my plays were not required. But in 1921 there were rumours of what is called industrial strife. That is to say, the miners were quite determined to fetch no more coal out of the earth for a long time, which would paralyse the railways and impoverish the whole country.

At this juncture, my third full-length play was produced. It was called "Sweet William," and I was responsible for the production at the request of the manager, who was too busy at the moment to supervise the rehearsals himself.

We opened at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on Easter Monday. The weather was very hot, and the coal strike was nearly ready to begin. But nobody in the theatre that night seemed to worry. George Tully was very nervous, but not about the coal strike. Brighton was then his "home town," and he could hardly breathe, poor lad, for thinking of all the people in front who knew him quite well.

Cathleen Nesbitt was the leading lady, and played delightfully. (So did Tully when his nerves quietened down.) George Elton gave one of the greatest performances of his career.

There was never any doubt about the success of the play. It went with furious joy from start to finish, and I actually had to make a speech. It was quite impromptu, but some of my friends paid me the great compliment of insisting that I had made it all up beforehand and learnt it by heart.

We took over £1000 that week at Brighton, exclusive of the Government's share, and then moved to Newcastle. Newcastle is the very place to try

out a new play when a coal strike is in progress. Everybody must be feeling so jolly. There was also a huge fire during the week, and incendiarism was naturally suspected. This put the ladies at their ease.

We took £700 at Newcastle. The manager told me he was losing money.

"Never mind," I said. "You are only trying out the play, and they had twenty-two curtain-calls after the third act on Monday."

"Yes, I heard about that," he replied. "I have given orders for these curtain-calls to be curtailed."

And yet I seem to have heard of calls being "stolen"! Strange!

After Newcastle the play went to Huddersfield. The strike was now well set. I mean, it was now a good strike. Not a scuttle of coal had been raised for some little time. The pit-ponies were being used for polo.

We took £500 at Huddersfield and there were speeches. I was not present. But I was well represented, and the reports were good. From Huddersfield we went to an awfully nice place in a coal strike, called Sheffield. I went to Sheffield, and expected to be knifed as I walked to my hotel from the station. But the miners were busy airing their grievances. They were certainly not in the pit—or gallery. The stalls and dress-circle, on the other hand, were filled. We played to £500 again, making £2,700 for the four weeks, despite the coal strike. I was hopeful, but the manager got sadder and sadder.

London was now like the time of the Great Plague. All the trains had stopped. Grass grew thickly where no blade had ever before appeared. At the theatre-hour you could walk down the middle of Piccadilly or

Regent Street or Shaftesbury Avenue or the Haymarket in perfect safety. Everybody was at home—or still walking home.

The theatres decided to close their doors. A piece called "Chu Chin Chow," hitherto a great success with curates from all parts of the country, put up its notice. The curates could not get to the Haymarket. It was all the camel could do to find the stage-door for the jungle of grass.

At this identical moment my play, "Sweet William," was produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre. I was not present, but next day I received letters and telegrams reproaching me for not taking my call. "You would have had an ovation," wrote a very distinguished actress. But how could a man take a call at the Shaftesbury when he was watching the performance of somebody else's play on the West Pier at Brighton?

The notices were really good. If I live to be two hundred, and have plays produced with regularity at all times of national crisis, I shall never have better notices than I got for "Sweet William." I should blush, even at this distance of time, to repeat them.

However, the strike went on and so we came off. The manager might have sent the play on tour, but evidently £2,700 in four weeks was not sufficient money to justify the risk. I could do nothing with it until his option had expired, which took twelve months. By that time the play was forgotten.

I warned the reader that these experiences with plays would be amusing, for there is nothing quite so funny, they say, as the misfortunes of others. But people who laugh at the misfortunes of others should not be so illogical as to expect sympathy in their own

misfortunes. I laugh at my misfortunes, and am therefore entitled to laugh at the misfortunes of others. But this is more difficult, somehow.

Since that disastrous strike I have not had a full-length play produced in London. I have had various offers, which would have excited me as a young man. But I have learnt by this time to expect nothing from plays but national catastrophes.

I used to say there was no such thing as luck. I have changed my opinion. There may not be good luck, but there is certainly bad luck. If you come to think it out, it is good luck to avoid bad luck. The dramatist who gets his play produced at a first-class theatre, in a first-class manner, at a time when the attention of the public is not distracted from play-going, should go down on his knees and thank God for the absence of bad luck. I have had notable absences of bad luck, but very seldom in connection with playwriting.

And now for some amusing stories about my adventures in the music-halls, as they used to be called.

CHAPTER XXI

SKETCHES AND ACTING

IT was about the year 1907 that the fashion began for stars of the theatre to appear on the music-hall stage. I think Sir Alfred Butt must have been responsible for this innovation, but Sir Oswald Stoll certainly smiled on the notion. Huge sums were paid to the people with the biggest names, and this expenditure would have been justified to the full if the stars had had sketches specially written for them, instead of relying on some one-act play the rights of which they happened to possess.

I have written a good many one-act plays since the days of "Compromising Martha," and I have had them played, and played in them, both at theatres and in music-halls. Sometimes, as I will show, the little play written for the theatre will also succeed in a hall, but as a rule it is better to vary the treatment. Roughly speaking, I should say that the one-act play for the theatre depends on atmosphere and character, whereas the music-hall sketch relies on plot and curtain. A good curtain is indispensable for success on the halls. It is also the hardest thing to get. Thousands of sketches have failed because the authors could not think of a really effective curtain.

I was one night asked by Sir Alfred Butt if I could write a sketch for a well-known actor to star in at the

Palace. Now, it so happened that my friend Courtice Pounds—one of the very few actors I happened to know personally—had been telling me of his desire to get hold of a sketch that he could pop on at a music-hall whenever he was out of a theatrical engagement. I remembered this conversation and said to Butt :

“Yes, of course I could. But why not Charlie Pounds?”

“How much would he want?” asked Butt.

I ventured to name a figure.

“All right,” said Butt, “if you can fit him with a good sketch.”

Off I went to Pounds, and we sat up in his flat till the small hours whilst he expounded to me the sort of sketch he wanted. It must be musical, of course, and he must dance, and assume various disguises. He wanted to be a Frenchman, an Italian, a country yokel, a popular tenor, and himself. And he wanted a good part for his sister.

I went away, and in three hours wrote, “Charles, His Friend,” which he played, on and off, for seven years. Pounds was delighted with the sketch. He got Herman Finck and Harold Samuel to write the music, and the cast consisted of himself, Miss Louie Pounds, J. Cooke Beresford, and Miss Pearl Keats, a member of the clan that produced the poet. Miss Keats had just returned from a tour in Australia, where she had won considerable success. You will find her portrait somewhere in this volume, and I shall presently find her, all being well, not very far from the room in which I am writing.

We rehearsed at the Palace, did a few try-out per-



Photo by Swaine, Old Bond Street

THE LADY OF THE DEDICATION

formances at the County Theatre, Kingston-on-Thames, and produced at the Palace on August Bank Holiday, 1907. There was never any question of the success of the sketch. The idea was copied again and again, and is still being copied. We played six weeks at the Palace, and could have played eight but that Pounds had entered into contracts at Liverpool and Manchester.

As producer, I went with the company to Liverpool. On the Monday night the stage-hands took so long to set the scene that the curtain was "kept down," which the manager did not like. So we found ourselves playing after the bioscope. This was not in accordance with the dignity of "top of the bill," and I went to the manager and remonstrated. He said the curtain must not be kept down more than sixty seconds. I promised that it should not be delayed even that length of time.

The trouble was the second piano. Both Pounds and his sister had to play the piano, but they would not trust to their own playing, so a second grand piano had to be wheeled into position, just outside a window, and this was played by Harold Samuel, then an almost unknown youth, but now the famous exponent of Bach.

Just before the curtain went up on the second night at Liverpool I noticed that the second grand piano was not in its place. It was essential that Samuel should see all the movements of the dummy players.

"Come on, Harold!" I yelled, and together we shoved the real piano into position. I then retired to the prompt-corner to work the curtain, which had not been satisfactorily done on the previous night.

Walking home with Samuel to our hotel that night

he pointed to a magnificent building, the name of which I forgot.

“The last time I was in Liverpool,” he said, “I played a piece of my own composition in that building.”

“Splendid!” I replied. “If it comes to that, you know, I’m not in the habit of ringing the curtain up and down in music-halls.”

And then we both laughed.

My second sketch was not written for the halls, but it was very successful, to my surprise, in that element.

I was having breakfast in my rooms in Craven Street one morning when Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Faber were announced. They were somewhat excited. We were all rather young at the time.

“Can you,” they demanded, “let us have a one-act play by to-morrow?”

“What sort of a play? How many people?”

“Two people—ourselves. And, if possible, evening-dress.”

“I’ve nothing written,” I told them, and their faces fell. “But come to-morrow at this time and you shall have it.”

“Good!” they cried. “It’s for the Vaudeville, and must go up on Monday next without fail.”

They went away and came back the next morning. In the meantime, I had written, “The Dramatist at Home,” which went into the bill at the Vaudeville Theatre the following Monday, and remained there to raise the curtain for the play then running, and also for its successor. Thence it went to the Hippodrome, which ran a variety bill at that time, and from the Hippodrome round the Moss and Stoll tour, a matter

of forty or more weeks. I think that might be called a success.

When the Fabers were at New Cross Empire I went to see them. Outside the hall was a queue which did not look as though it would fancy a duologue of character, with a somewhat intricate little plot.

I went into the dressing-room and expressed my sympathy.

“But we’ve played the first house,” they told me, “and they simply ate it!”

I stayed for the second house and found that this was true. Since that time I have tested music-hall audiences even more severely, as you shall hear, and invariably found that if you gave them a well-written story with a good curtain they would feed out of your hand. The music-hall sketch failed because managers and agents did not know what their public wanted.

I never expected to act either on the halls or in theatres myself, although I had been accustomed to the stage as an amateur from very early days. And yet I was drawn into it, and by no less an actress than Miss Violet Vanbrugh.

This was how it happened. About the year 1908, when I was living at an hotel in Eastbourne, and writing my novel, “Miss Charity,” I got a letter from Mr. Aubrey Smith asking me if I had a duologue in which Miss Marie Lohr and himself could appear at a charity matinee. I had not, but I at once wrote one and sent it to Mr. Aubrey Smith. He eventually returned it to me, unacted, and I flung it into a drawer.

Seven years elapsed, and my wife and myself were asked to “do” a duologue at a show in aid of some war fund at Redhill. I got out my little piece, in which

I had always believed, and we made a nice little hit with it at Redhill. The name of the dialogue was, "The Test Kiss."

When I went to Edinburgh to produce my play, "Forked Lightning," afterwards called, "The Green Flag," my wife and I were again asked to do something at an afternoon concert in aid of the Daigleish Military Hospital. We repeated, "The Test Kiss," and I began to perceive that this little play would never fail with any audience.

We did it under all sorts of conditions—in rooms, in hospital wards, in Y.M.C.A. huts. It never failed. At one time our audience consisted for the most part of ex-convicts. They were a splendid audience.

Miss Violet Vanbrugh, who had seen it at Edinburgh, asked me to let her do it on the halls. I consented, and she played it with various actors, none of whom I ever saw. Then one day I got a letter from her to say that she was booked for two Sunday performances on the Palace Pier, Brighton, with "The Test Kiss," and her actor was ill. Would I play the part and get her out of the difficulty?

Oddly enough, whenever I have acted on the professional stage—with the exception of the Croydon Repertory and a tour I took out of "The Girl Who Couldn't Lie" and "Compromising Martha"—it was always to get somebody out of a difficulty.

I hated the idea of playing on the Palace Pier, chiefly because I live at Hove. Still, one could not desert a lady in distress, so one Sunday afternoon I wended my melancholy way up that long, long pier, pushing past thousands of people enjoying the sunshine, and not caring two pins what was going on inside the theatre.

We played to a very mild house, but in the evening the audience was good, and the little play went well. Miss Vanbrugh then sprung it on me that she was booked for the Winter Garden, Bournemouth. Would I play there also ?

I consented. Mind you, I quite realised the honour of acting with so distinguished a lady, but I think that made it worse. Miss Violet Vanbrugh has a tremendous personality, and one needed much strength to hold one's own in the play.

The afternoon show at Bournemouth was not particularly well attended, the weather being very fine, but when I went across to the Winter Garden in the evening I had the shock of my life. Not only was every seat filled, not only was the audience standing seven deep, not only were some hundreds peering through a glass partition, with no hope of hearing a word, but the stage itself was full of people ! It was like a nightmare come true ! I had to push my way through the audience on the stage to make my entrance in a nonchalant manner ! And I felt so ashamed of playing with my back to these poor dears that once or twice I turned right round and gave them a line or so all to themselves. They were very grateful.

After this experience, nothing would satisfy Miss Vanbrugh but an assault on the Coliseum, where the sketch had already been turned down more than once. Our Bournemouth success must have convinced them, however, for we were duly booked for two weeks at the top of the bill.

This was a shattering experience. Sketches at the Coliseum seldom made any real hit. I myself had seen dozens that bored me nearly to tears, and yet the

people in them were stars of the most luminous. Somehow or other, the house seemed too large for plays in one act.

Not a bit of it—if you have the right play and get it across. You must let every person in the house hear every word spoken. That is the difficulty, but it can be overcome.

We stayed three weeks at the Coliseum, and were never moved from what is known as the “big time”—about five minutes past ten at the second house. Miss Vanbrugh told me that she had appeared in seventeen sketches at the Coliseum, and never before had her time been unaltered. The curious may also watch and see how many sketches remain in the bill for three consecutive weeks.

A good deal of surprise was expressed that a man who had been known as a critic, as a journalist, as a novelist, and a dramatist should drift on to that vast stage and make some success—may I say?—as an actor. But there was nothing in it after the first ordeal. Miss Vanbrugh, an excellent part, and the experience of a lifetime on all sorts of platforms carried me through.

From the Coliseum we went to the Chiswick Empire, and then to Liverpool, Bristol, Leeds and Brighton. At Bristol we appeared, of course, at the Hippodrome, a most delightful house to play in. Every seat was sold throughout the week, and after each performance of the sketch the orchestra rose in their places and led the applause—a most unusual happening! One night the musical director waited for me when I was coming into the theatre, and congratulated me most warmly on the show. He said it was the best

sketch they had had at the Hippodrome since the house opened.

At Liverpool, on the other hand, they did not care for us. The city was teeming with unemployed, who paraded past my hotel three times daily, escorted by police. A Jewish sketch in the bill went much better than we did. But the *Liverpool Post* kindly said that no more convincing acting had ever been seen in Liverpool.

Miss Vanbrugh told me an amusing story of her touring experiences. One Sunday night, tired and dishevelled after a long and slow journey, she arrived with her maid at a certain town where it was the custom to assemble at the station and "look over" the incoming players for the week. A girl in the crowd, having narrowly inspected the famous actress from head to foot and back again, said :

"Oh! So that's you, is it? Reckon I'll keep my money for the pickchers."

A jolly reception. It reminds me of the only occasion when I toured the provinces with my own theatrical company, and played the lead in two of my own plays. These, as I have mentioned, were "The Girl Who Couldn't Lie," and "Compromising Martha." I knew very little about the inner mechanism of touring, so entrusted my affairs to a manager who had been recommended to me by a friend of wide experience.

My own desire was to visit the smaller towns, such as Oxford, Cambridge, Bedford, Cheltenham, Bath, and so forth. But I was over-ruled. The gentleman in charge of the booking arrangements strongly urged me to accept dates which he could secure at Glasgow,

Edinburgh, Newcastle, and Nottingham. The weeks were not quite consecutive, or geographically favourable, but he could "fill me in" at Dudley, and I was to go from Newcastle to Dundee and Aberdeen.

My company was nearly twenty-five strong, and I had to carry scenery for the two plays. We opened at Glasgow, and the fares for this little party from London to Glasgow was the first blow. I had had a transparency specially painted for "The Girl Who Couldn't Lie," and during the Sunday evening rehearsal at the Theatre Royal one of the stage-hands kindly put his foot through it.

At the King's Theatre, Martin Harvey was appearing with "The Only Way" and his customary repertoire. At another theatre local amateurs, always a great attraction, were giving one of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. The month was September, when all fashionable Scotland makes holiday, the consequence being that my Repertory supporters were absent from the city.

It was not a good week.

We moved on to Edinburgh. My company was at the Royal, but I had taken rooms immediately opposite the Lyceum. Here I found Lewis Waller installed, playing "The Butterfly on the Wheel" with his full London company, including Miss Madge Tithe-radge.

Towards the latter part of the afternoon, I used to sit in the window and count the queue for Waller's early doors. "Two—four—eight—twenty—forty—ninety-six," until the queue was right down the street, and I had to fight my way through the seething masses of eager Wallerites to get to the Royal, where we tried

to amuse the people who had passes for exhibiting window-bills.

Dudley came next. The theatre and the railway-station were conveniently near together, but the town was a long way off. I stayed at the railway hotel. There was a little picture-house attached to the theatre, and I begged the manager of the two houses to let us play in the smaller one. He refused.

There was one bright spot in this week, and only one. On a certain night I observed a very large, fat man sitting all alone in the stalls. I think it was the only stall occupied, but that did not depress him in the least. He laughed, and he laughed, and he laughed. All of a sudden, there was a fearful crash. The seat had given way under the unaccustomed strain. But the fat man did not mind. He just picked himself up, took another stall, and went on laughing.

We then went to Nottingham. The first thing I saw on entering the town was a huge placard which read :

NEXT WEEK ! NEXT WEEK ! NEXT WEEK !
GOOSE FAIR WEEK ! TWICE NIGHTLY—"THE
CINGALEE." SMOKING PERMITTED FOR THE FIRST
TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THE THEATRE. NEXT
WEEK ! NEXT WEEK ! NEXT WEEK !

Not, you understand, my week. These posters were all over the town. I could feel the public making up their minds to save their money for the Great Goose Fair Attraction.

But I was wrong. On the second night of our stay the business began to pick up. I had found an audience at last. All the better-class people turned out, and the array of motors and limousines was encouraging. We

did quite a decent week despite the fact that it was the worst week in the year. Both plays, for the matter of that, always went splendidly in every town we visited. I played "Compromising Martha" as an after-piece, with Mary Brough as Martha and myself as the Curate.

From Nottingham we went to Newcastle, playing at the old Tyne Theatre. At the principal theatre I found "against me" the No. 1 George Edwardes company, with Robert Michaelis and Phyllis Le Grand as stars. They were giving such unknown trifles as "The Dollar Princess," "The Waltz Dream," and "The Merry Widow."

The curtain at the Tyne was worked by human labour. On the Monday we had one curtain for each act. I said I expected four or five, and the curtain must rise and fall more rapidly. To this day I can see the crowd of stage-hands flinging themselves madly at that rope and making the curtain jump. They had their reward. So had I to some extent. We packed the pit solid after the first night or two.

I had cancelled my Scottish dates. I expected to find Sir Herbert Tree against me at Aberdeen and Sir George Alexander at Dundee. The odds were too severe. I had had my lesson. The reader may divine it for himself.

When "The Green Flag" was done at the Vaudeville, we opened with a very poor curtain-raiser. Something else had to be substituted at once, and the manager implored me to step into the breach with "The Test Kiss." (You will see that I am not far wrong in describing myself as an "emergency actor." This is one who helps a manager out of a hole, gets no



AT THE COLISEUM WITH CATHLEEN NESBITT

ha'pence, but plenty of kicks. Never be one, friend the reader.)

I pointed out that "The Test Kiss" was too delicate a piece to play the stalls and dress-circle to their seats, but offered to do "The Dramatist at Home" with my wife—the little play I had written for Leslie Faber and his wife at this very theatre. So we did it, and when the main play was transferred to the Criterion we went on doing "The Dramatist" there as well. All this was long before I played in "The Test Kiss" with Miss Violet Vanbrugh.

The third act of "Forked Lightning"—afterwards called "The Green Flag"—had always struck me as being the very thing for a music-hall sketch, so I carved it out, called it "Puss in the Corner," and submitted it to the Coliseum, suggesting Miss Cathleen Nesbitt and myself as twin "stars." It was accepted, and we topped the bill for two weeks. I thus realised an ambition which had seemed the dream of a madman, namely, to have my name as an actor in letters of fire outside the Coliseum.

The little play went very well—my wife played a Temple laundress and made quite a nice little hit—but the huge Coliseum stage gave it no chance. I should have had a scene specially built, but with only two weeks booked the risk was too great.

They have a little habit at the Coliseum of revolving the stage without dropping the "tabs." I had stipulated that the curtains should be dropped before my sketch. I had to open the play, being discovered at my desk in the Temple late at night.

The first week all was well, but on the Monday afternoon of the second week I suddenly found myself

being whirled round in full view of the audience. As I had not been warned, and had always utilised these whirling moments for final preparations, the change was not at first helpful. But I later turned it to account, for as we disappeared in the other direction after taking our call I used to wave a cheery farewell to the audience, which pleased them so much that we got another good round of applause.

My next appearance—also an emergency one—was in a sketch of my own called “An Order to View,” in which I starred Miss Connie Ediss. We played two weeks at the Palladium and a week at the Victoria Palace. The sketch was then booked for the Hippodrome, Manchester, and here the leading juvenile actor could not appear. At least, he had had an unexpected offer of a part in a play, and asked me to let him off. So I went up to Manchester and played the part myself. We did fourteen shows in the week.

Miss Ediss sang a verse from her famous song, “Oh, I like Society” in the middle of the sketch, and I had to accompany her on the piano, and then, when the orchestra took up the refrain, join her in a wild dance. It was great fun, but I fear Manchester was rather horrified.

We went from Manchester to Birmingham, and as somebody had not bothered to correct the printing, the name of the original actor still appeared in all the programmes. This led to a rather amusing mistake. The critic of a leading local paper said :

“We observe that Miss Connie Ediss is ‘presented’ in this sketch by Mr. Keble Howard, but that does not interest us. What does interest us is that Miss Ediss is

still Miss Ediss, and that a very noteworthy performance is given by an actor named Something So-and-so."

Which gave me the opportunity of writing to point out that Mr. Something So-and-So was really the utterly uninteresting Mr. Keble Howard himself.

The most recent of my own plays in which I appeared—again as an emergency actor—was a farce in three acts called, "Lord Babs." A try-out was arranged for this farce at the King's, Southsea, to be followed by a week at Cardiff, a week at Brighton, and two dates in North Wales.

Donald Calthrop was engaged to play the lead, but on the Wednesday before production I got an urgent telephone message at my house at Hove to say that Calthrop was ill and could not play. Would I go to town at once?

The production was due at Southsea the following Monday, and the leading part was a very heavy one. Added to this, a heat-wave was in full progress. However, I dashed up to town, and found the manager and the company in a state of the greatest dejection. The company had to face the loss of a week's work, and the manager had to face a fine of three hundred pounds, the waste of his printing, and other expenses—about five hundred pounds in all.

It was put to me that I could save the situation by playing the leading part myself. I was horrified. I knew not two consecutive lines of the part. (Strange as it may seem, authors do *not* commit the whole of their plays to memory.)

Besides, why should I jeopardise my play? Cardiff was booked for the week after Southsea, and that

would give ample time for another professional actor to be engaged and rehearsed.

The manager pleaded that he would in that case lose his five hundred pounds. I hate to see a man lose money when I can save it for him, so I hurled myself into the breach, snatched up the play, and began to rehearse then and there.

It was an awful experience. The part was an active one, and I am not a lad of twenty. We rehearsed all that day, and when it was over I was far too drenched to travel down to Brighton. So I went to a shop and bought a complete change, had a bath at the club, and only then was able to make my way to Victoria.

I sat up till midnight learning that act, and the next day went through the same ordeal again. We did an act a day and I learnt an act a night. On the Saturday I took the play right through at top speed, and on the Sunday went to Southsea for the dress-rehearsal.

The weather was hotter than ever. Long before one had got into one's clothes, they were wet through. And the streets were stifling. It was obvious that we should play to very thin audiences. In addition to the great heat, we were playing only once nightly, whilst the King's, Southsea, is a twice nightly house. Nothing upsets patrons of a theatre like a change of that sort.

We took the play through as at night, and the manager then said : "Now we'll do it all over again!"

I protested. I was pretty well all in. For four nights, after my long days of rehearsing and study, I had had scarcely any sleep. I said I could not possibly act the play all over again, but I might get through the

words without the business. So that was what we did. None of these professional players had a part anything like as strenuous as that of the mere amateur.

I had another very bad night, and returned to the theatre in the morning for another rehearsal. We did the whole play with business and action. In the meantime, at my urgent request, a professional actor had been brought from London to take up the part as soon as possible. He had been on the stage whilst we were rehearsing in London, and he had the advantage of seeing the play from the front at Southsea as a complete thing. Further, he had not to worry, as I had, about details of production. He simply had to slip into the part that had been made for him.

When I went to the theatre at seven o'clock that evening, the pavements were so hot that one could hardly bear to tread on them. The people were lying about on the common, gasping for air. And I had to play for the first time on any stage the principal part in a new long play of my own writing.

The King's, Southsea, is a very large theatre, and I felt as I waited for my entrance that the opening scene was being played in too quiet a key. What you can do at the St. Martin's in London will not get over in these large provincial houses. Luckily, my experience in big variety houses stood me in good stead, and I was able to strike a bolder note as soon as I got on.

The success of the play was immediate. Even with a small audience, on a night like that, it went with clean hearty laughter all through the three acts, sometimes rising to shouts of merriment. At the end of the play the audience insisted on a speech. I said :

“ Ladies and gentlemen, You may not be aware of

it, but you have to-night been assisting at what is, I believe, a theatrical record. I do not know of any other instance when an author has been called upon, five days before the production of his new play, to take up the principal part. However, thanks to your generous laughter and applause, and to the support of an excellent company, I have got through it, and I thank God it's over."

I had no congratulations from any member of the company, but the manager came to my dressing-room and said I had "done wonders." He did not say that I was good in the part—a fact that had significance.

The next day was given up to rehearsing the gentleman who was to take my place. I went down to the theatre, but my services were not required. The company seemed very aloof. I presumed that I was not to be encouraged!

That night the storm broke. I had ventured to discard a night-shirt which I had worn in the second act in favour of a dressing-gown. My reason was to help the play. I had felt instinctively on the previous night that the audience resented the night-shirt. I don't know why. Perhaps they thought it was not seemly—like the lady who rebuked the gardener for playing lawn-tennis in his braces, only to be told that he must have "both hands free."

The act went even better than the night before, but the manager was not pleased with the change. I had taken up the part at very short notice, against my own interests, to save him five hundred pounds. All this did not prevent him from coming to my dressing-room whilst the sweat was still pouring off me and telling me that the show had no earthly chance if played as I was

playing it, and that he meant to have a very different state of things at Cardiff. Above all, he meant to have the night-shirt !

I remembered something that he had said to me when we were first talking matters over. He had said: "I don't care what I lose on the try-out. I don't expect to make money."

With this in my mind I put it to him that I had better retire forthwith in favour of the professional actor, who would play the part in accordance with his wishes. Wrongly or rightly, I felt sure that that was what he wanted, and, as ever, I wished to help.

The next night, therefore, the part was played by the professional actor, and I confess that the business went up ! As for me, I returned to Hove and consulted a doctor, who said that in his opinion I could not have played another night.

I doubt if I shall ever again allow theatrical managers to play little tunes on my heart strings. They don't seem to me to have a sense of gratitude highly developed. I was a "hero" on the Wednesday when I took up the part, and something quite different on the Tuesday when I changed a night-shirt to a dressing-gown.

How we must amuse the angels !

CHAPTER XXII

THE CROYDON REPERTORY THEATRE

THE Croydon Repertory Theatre was unique in that it had no enthusiast with richly-lined pockets behind it, such as the Manchester and Birmingham Repertory Theatres had, nor were any members of the public invited to risk their money in the venture. There were two seasons—one in 1913 and the second in 1914. For the first season, the financial risk was borne by the owner of the theatre, who was a business man in the City of London, and only incidentally connected, as it were, with the world of the theatre. For the second season I took all the risk myself—that is to say, I was in exactly the same position as the touring manager who comes into a theatre on sharing terms. And I made a little money. (How the owner did out of the first season, I know not. He said he lost money, but I never saw the books. Anyway, it could not have been much, for everything was done with the greatest economy.)

The origin of the Croydon Repertory was on this wise. In 1911 I bought a house at Merstham, in Surrey, about eight miles from Croydon. It was a delightful house, designed by that brilliant architect, Mr. Baillie Scott. There was no house at all like it in the neighbourhood.

Merstham itself, however, I found dull. I did my

best to wake it up. I organised concerts and theatricals, but still I found it dull. There were cheerful people in the place, but not enough of them to go all round the week.

One night I paid a visit to the Grand Theatre, Croydon. At that time there was a young acting-manager in charge, by the name of Adams. He reminded me that we had met before, and that I knew some of his family. We chatted away, and suddenly I said to him :

“ Why don’t you run a repertory season here ? ”

At that time I was very keen on repertory. I had seen the workings of the Repertory Theatres at Glasgow, at Manchester, and at Birmingham. True, these places had nothing to fear from the competition of London, whereas Croydon is only a few minutes in the train from London, but we did not bother our heads about that. Adams instantly fell for the Croydon Repertory notion, and promised to fix up a meeting between myself and the owner of the theatre.

It must be borne in mind that although at that time there was much talk of repertory in the papers, the public at large had not the vaguest ideas as to what it meant. Some thought it was a trick whereby improper plays could be produced without fear of the police, and others had the notion that you could take your wife or your daughter to a repertory theatre without running the risk of squirming in your seat. They were sure, anyway, that it had something to do with morals. The wedding of literature and theatrical art never occurred to them.

In talking to the owner of the theatre, I harped on “ prestige.” I said a repertory season would lift the Grand, Croydon, out of the rut of suburban theatres,

and make it esteemed beyond rubies. This, I think, appealed to him, and he agreed to a six weeks' season, and he would stand the racket. But he wanted the names of the plays to be performed submitted to him. He was most anxious, I remember, that we should include, "The Thief." We did not.

The next move was to hold a general meeting in the theatre, and lay our scheme before the Croydon public. I got Sir George Alexander and Granville Barker to come down and address the meeting. Alexander represented the established type of actor-manager, and Granville Barker, of course, the Advanced Intellectual Movement.

We had a fair-sized audience, but not nearly so big as it would have been had Adams taken my advice and asked three times as many people as the theatre would hold. He objected that we should have a riot in the street. I said, "So much the better. A mob fighting to get in is what I want."

I led off by telling the audience what plays we should present. (These were, "Chains," "The Tyranny of Tears," "The Situation at Newbury," "The New Sin," "Dropping the Pilot," and "Candida." There was a new one-act play by a well-known Croydon gentleman, who appeared in it himself. He also gave a very brilliant performance in "Chains"—so much so that people from London asked me where I had found him.)

I then explained our system of book-tickets. So much down and you had two stalls or two circle-seats for the season. But you had to be quick!

Sir George Alexander followed, and made a most graceful and charming speech, as he always did. He

said he would like nothing better in the world than to run his own theatre on repertory lines, but the question of finance was prohibitive. He concluded by offering me any play in his repertoire without fee. (When the second season came, as already recorded, I remembered that offer and took advantage of it.)

Granville Barker talked with all his wonted enthusiasm about the great Repertory Cause. He said it was the only thing to save the theatre from perdition, and that, if necessary, he was prepared to lay down his life for it. He concluded by telling the audience that he should go straight from the stage to the box-office and buy a two-guinea book of tickets. (As it happened, they had not come from the printers, but we got the two guineas, and I think the nurses from the local hospital used the tickets.)

The meeting was a great success and the money began to roll in—so much so that the owner of the theatre put a stop to the sale of books. He contended that these were his regular patrons getting into the theatre at less than the usual price, and that they would never again rise to his prices.

I had now to engage my company. The first person I approached was Miss Irene Vanbrugh, who was then playing at the Haymarket. I was longing to do Pinero's "Mid-Channel," that glorious play, and he had given me permission to do it if I could get Irene Vanbrugh in her original part. I boldly offered her three figures. She hesitated, having an offer from the St. James's. She said if she refused the St. James's she would come to me for the season. Very well, then. She went to the St. James's.

Eventually I got that excellent actress, Madge

McIntosh, Eille Norwood, Stanley Lathbury, William Stack, Pearl Keats, and several other people whose names I have for the moment forgotten.

Adams, in the meantime, had been writing to all sorts of people, enclosing stamped telegraph-forms, and asking them to wire us their good wishes on the opening night. He did not consult me as to the celebrities on whom this great honour should be bestowed, with the consequence that he got one or two snubs, especially from authors whose works had not been selected. Anyway, he read out all the good ones in front of the curtain, and I then delivered a short lecture on the play about to be performed.

This was a novelty. I did it every Monday night, partly to help the business on the worst night of the week, and partly to help the audience and the players. I also inserted a "Producer's Note" to the same effect in each programme. I remember that Granville Barker wrote me enthusiastically about this. "I take off my hat," he said, "to your Producer's Note."

"Chains" hit the Croydonians very hard. It is, without doubt, one of the most searching modern plays in the language. And it hit off precisely the tragedy of thousands of young lives—and old lives, too, for that matter—in a place where half the population went to town each morning and returned each evening. It was a daring play with which to open the season, but I wanted my audiences to know, once and for all, what repertory meant. "Chains" is the perfect repertory play.

My little company did it extremely well. Dion Boucicault kindly offered to lend me his prompt-book, but I did not use it. I felt that I could work

better from my own stand point, yet this is by no means an easy play to produce. Ask any producer who has done it. The story is very disjointed, being wholly natural, and there are hundreds of little bits of business that require "timing" to a nicety. But I was very proud of the show. And so, I think, was Elizabeth Baker, the author, who came over to see it.

"The Tyranny of Tears" is a comparatively easy play to do. Haddon Chambers asked me to let him know how the play had worn, as there was a prospect of reviving it. I told him it wore very well, but some of the long speeches, so wonderfully rolled off by Sir Charles Wyndham—and said to have been written in by him—were now old-fashioned.

"The Situation at Newbury" was a play by Charles McEvoy. It was sent to me by an agent as a new play, and I accepted it as such, but subsequently discovered it had been done in Liverpool.

McEvoy came to Croydon and asked if he might produce the play himself. I told him he might on the understanding that I could step in and take over the production at any moment. He did not seem to realise that we were doing a new play each week with the same company. Every Monday night we produced a new play, and every Tuesday morning we started rehearsals on the next play. There were two matinees a week, and we had no Sunday rehearsals.

McEvoy started rehearsing his play on the Tuesday morning, and I stayed at home and got on with my own work. In the evening Miss McIntosh—who was residing with us for the season—and my wife were full of lamentations. They said McEvoy simply strolled about in front of the stalls, smoked cigarettes, and let

them do as they liked. The consequence was that everybody talked at once, and unless I took command forthwith the play stood no earthly chance of being produced on the Monday night.

I let them depart in the morning by themselves, but followed by the next train and went, unobserved, into the circle. McEvoy's methods were certainly peculiar. They might have been effective in the long run, but time was the essence of the contract.

I told him that evening that I would take over in the morning. He was quite nice about it until we met at the buffet, where he was having a glass of beer. He complained that he had struck his head against the top of the pass-door, coming from the stage to the auditorium a few minutes since.

“And look here!” he added. “I don't know if it's the beer or the blow on the head, but I've suddenly become very angry! Why *shouldn't* I produce my own play? This is exactly the way I was treated at the Haymarket!”

He left Croydon the next day and never saw the production, which was a pity, because we did him very well. He is a gifted playwright, but not, I venture to say, a lightning producer.

I have already described the production of my own play, “Dropping the Pilot”—originally called “The Whip Hand”—and its subsequent career. During the performance of this play one night the owner of the theatre came up to me at the back of the circle and said he had thought of a new title. I led him into the corridor.

“Now, look here, Howard,” he said, “I knew George Edwardes very well, and he often used to find

titles for his authors. I'm going to do the same for you. This title won't do at all. People think it's a play about sailors. If you take my advice, you'll call it, 'A Son-in-Law's Dilemma.' "

"Candida" did not interest me very much. When I came to work on it, I found that the characters lacked reality. So I persuaded Miss McIntosh to do most of the production. She knew the play backwards.

So ended our first season. For the second season, four weeks only, we did "Liberty Hall," "His Excellency the Governor," "The Cheerful Knave," and "The Importance of Being Earnest." My new company was headed by Campbell Gullan and Mary Merrall. Another newcomer was Geoffrey Gilbey, who afterwards won great fame as "Tottenham," the racing expert of the *Sunday Express*. He was a most cheerful person, mad on music and horses. I remember that he had a good win during the season, and stood us all a meal at his rooms.

Our great night was Saturday. On Saturday night people came in from all the country round, and the street, a very narrow one, was blocked with motor-cars. These Saturday night audiences were full of enthusiasm, laughing and applauding to the very limit.

So I stepped in front of the curtain one Saturday and thus addressed them :

"It is very kind of you to laugh and applaud in this generous manner, and I am sure you have all had a very jolly evening. But you don't seem to realize that we have been practically alone all the week. It's all very well for you to come here and enjoy yourselves on a Saturday night, but you might think

of us during the week, playing to almost empty benches."

They applauded that as well, and the next week some of them actually did turn up on off nights. But they consoled themselves by coming again on the Saturday.

I just paid expenses and a little bit over on the season. It was hard work, but I should certainly have gone on but for the Great War, which came down on us like an iron shutter.



IN THE GREAT WAR.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW I GOT DEMOBBED

I HAVE an ineradicable objection to going twice over the same ground, and so I propose to say nothing in this volume about my travels, and very little about the Great War.

My journey through the United States of America, up the Pacific coast, and home through Canada—a journey of 15,000 miles, which I undertook all alone, at my own expense, and with no other object than to see a little of the world—is briefly described in a small book I wrote called, “Chicot in America.” It is probably out of print, but anybody who wants to read it, if such person there be, can probably get hold of a copy through a bookseller. I doubt if they will bother.

For the rest, I have been to Sweden, Finland, Russia, Denmark, Holland, Germany and France. I have visited all the cities of Italy, and I spent a fortnight in Switzerland watching the Winter Sports. I went to Marseilles on a Dutch boat, touched at Tangier, saw part of a filthy “bull-fight” at Algeciras, slipped along to Nice and Monte Carlo, and finished up at Rotterdam. I once wintered in Paris, and found it much colder than England.

As to the Great War, I have told of my adventures in that grim period of our history in a book called, “An Author in Wonderland.” That, also, is probably

out of print, which is rather a pity, because it contained some interesting descriptions of the work done by the civilian population during the War. Some day it may be rescued from the book-box, and then posterity will learn how one shuttle-cocked author, after being a telephone-operator at the Admiralty under Sir Percy Scott, and after passing five examinations to get a commission in the Royal Air Force, was eventually seconded to the Ministry of Information, and settled down to put in some useful work at his own job.

There is one thing not included in that volume, however, and that is the story of my demobilisation. It has often amused my friends, and so it may amuse the reader of this book.

Immediately after the Armistice, I received an official communication informing me that my services were no longer required by the Ministry of Information, and that I should at once report to the Air Board. I was still a second lieutenant, and it was not for me, therefore, to expect rewards or fairies. Mine to get back whence I came, and no to-do about it.

I went along to the Hotel Cecil and informed a janitor that I had come to report myself. He asked me to what unit I belonged. I replied to no unit, having come from the Ministry of Information. He bade me report to room 684. (I cannot, of course, remember the real numbers of the rooms.)

I went up to Room 684, tapped respectfully at the door, and was told to enter. So I entered, and a fierce young gentleman in very fierce khaki asked what the devil I wanted.

“If you please, sir,” said I, “I was told to come to this room and report.”

"What's your name?"

"Bell, sir."

"Where do you come from?"

"The Ministry of Information, sir."

"Good God! We don't know anything about you here. Better try Room 873."

Off I posted, only to meet with much the same sort of reception. I think on that day I visited every room in the Hotel Cecil. All were occupied by very warlike young gentlemen in very warlike khaki. I thought it was a jolly good job for the Germans the War was over. Little they knew about these magnificent reserves.

At last, being very weary, I said to myself, "I think I'll go home and report by letter." This I did, and heard no more. 1918 gave place to 1919, and I had now established myself in a little flat at Hove. Life was getting better, and I was beginning to pick up the old threads, when suddenly I received a telegram.

"Report at once to Room 946 Air Board."

"They are going to thank me," I thought, "for my sterling work at the Ministry of Information. Perhaps they will hand me a medal, or possibly promote me to first lieutenant."

I hurried to London, therefore, and reported at the correct room.

"Who the devil are you?" asked a tremendously combative young person.

I told him I was second-lieutenant Bell.

"Where the devil have you been all this time?" was the next question.

I told him I had been at my permanent address.

"Why didn't you report here?"

I told him I had tried very hard to report, but nobody would let me.

“And do you think it playing the game,” demanded this frightfully ferocious young party, “to draw your pay all this time and do nothing for it?”

I told him, with becoming humility, that I had drawn no pay since the Armistice.

“Well, you’ll find it’s been paid into your account!” he growled.

I told him he could have it back with pleasure.

“I’ll tell you what we’re going to do with *you*,” he went on. “We’re going to send you to Mesopotamia.”

I said I begged his pardon, but that would not be convenient. I pointed out that I had a house at Merstham to keep going, and a flat at Hove, and, really, I must now get on with my private work. I added that I had been a volunteer from the first, without conditions as to service, but that at this juncture, the War being well over, I thought a gentleman of my age should be demobilised.

He said: “Have you got a job to go to?”

I said: “No, sir, not if you put it like that. I’m really a kind of author.”

“Can you support yourself?” he thundered.

I said I thought I could, having done so for some five-and-twenty years.

He said: “If you want to be demobbed, you must have a Medical Board. Do you want a Medical Board?”

I said I would accept anything of the kind he was graciously pleased to offer. So he sent me round to the Adelphi Hotel, where I stood for a long time on

one foot, and then transferred my weight to the other.

At last a kindly-looking gentleman, with a bald head, who had been writing very busily, looked up. "Yes?" said he.

I explained that I had been sent to see him with a reference to a board.

"I suppose," he replied, "you want to get out of the damned thing, as we all do?"

I said: "Sir, you have expressed my feelings with complete accuracy."

So he wrote something on a card, and told me to take it to Room 946, Hotel Cecil. Room 946 was now closed for the day, so I went back to Brighton in a first-class carriage, at my own expense, and returned to London next morning.

"Do you want to be demobbed?" demanded another fire-eating young friend.

"Yes, sir, if you please, sir," said I.

"Well, I can't do it. You must first of all write a letter on official paper, stating your reasons for wishing to be demobbed, and what sort of a job you've got. You must then take it to the Ministry of Labour and get it stamped. You must then come back here with all your papers, and after that, if everything is in order, I may be able to demob you."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. And would you mind telling me where the Ministry of Labour is to be found?"

"I don't know. I think it's in Queen's Gate."

But it wasn't, and the day was drawing in, so once more I returned to Brighton. I had no official note-paper, but I thought my own would do as well, per-

haps, so I wrote an awfully nice letter to nobody in particular saying I did *so* want to be demobbed, and I had a kind employer (myself) who would look after me and never give me the sack.

I then went for a walk about Brighton with the letter in my pocket, wondering how to get it stamped. Presently I noticed in a side street a long line of rather shabby gentlemen, and over their heads was written, "MINISTRY OF LABOUR." Here was a gift from the gods ! I walked in and asked for the Manager. They said he was upstairs. I went upstairs and again asked for the Manager. They said :

"We don't deal with officers here."

"Oh, but I'm not much of an officer," I replied. "Is that the Manager sitting at that table over there?"

They admitted it. I went across to him, asked how-did-he-do, and sat down. He was a nice quiet man. We took to one another on the spot.

I showed him my letter, which he read all through with ill-suppressed emotion.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Stamp it," I coaxed.

"I *can't*," was his answer.

"Oh, yes, you can," I assured him. "There's the little stamp. Just stamp it down on my letter, and all will be well."

"Ah!" he hesitated. "But *will* all be well? That's just it! I might get into serious trouble. I'm not supposed to deal with officers. You ought to go to Lewes."

"Now, Mr. Johnson—" said I.

"Thomson," he murmured.

"I beg your pardon. Thomson, of course. Now, Mr. Thomson, be human. I've been twice to London over this business, and ruin stares me in the face. You know how expensive things are on the Pullman. Just press your little stamp on that letter, and if there's any trouble I'll take the full responsibility."

"You will?"

"I will."

Bang! The letter was stamped, and I was off like a hare to London. Arrived for the third or fourth time at the Hotel Cecil, I was directed to room 666. Three Canadian officers were waiting outside the door, and I joined them. They told me they had been sent to York, and from York to Canterbury, and from Canterbury to Cardiff. They had spent all their money and lost all their luggage, and were now living in the corridor outside Room 666.

I stayed with them till lunch-time. Officers then began to bustle out in a tremendous hurry. One of them called out in passing that nothing could now be done till after lunch.

We drifted bunwards. At two o'clock we returned to the corridor outside Room 666, and continued to polish the wall. It was a good wall, but rather hard after some hours.

As the long afternoon wore on, an officer appeared with whom I had a slight acquaintance. I told him I had been waiting all day with my letter all in order, and begged him to do what he could. He disappeared into Room 666, but presently returned and drew me mysteriously aside.

"It's in this way," he said. "Your papers are in that room, but we can't find them."

“Nonsense,” I returned. “I’ll find them!”

I dashed into the room, and went straight to one of those dear little wicker baskets that lay on every desk marked “IN” and “OUT.” I have no idea what made me do it, but there were the missing papers.

They told me to take them to Room 817. Here, in the centre of the room, a very important and frightfully fierce warrior was telephoning to the Prime Minister or the Commander-in-Chief.

“What do *you* want?” he cursed, in blood-curdling tones.

“If you please, sir, I want to be demobilised.”

“Oh, you do, do you? Stand on one side and mind the wire.”

In my anxiety to please, I missed the latter half of the sentence. I moved to one side, entangled my foot in something, and there followed the most sickening crash! I had failed to mind the wire, caught my foot in it, and wrenched the receiver clean out of the grasp of this extraordinarily martial fellow.

“I *told* you to mind the wire!” he yelled.

Another officer now entered the room. To shoot me, I presumed. But no. He, too, wished “to get out of the damned thing.”

“Well, and what do *you* want?” cried my aggrieved Agamemnon.

“Well, sir, I’m a master at Eton, and—”

“Oh! Sit down, won’t you? Now, what can I do for you?” (And then to me) “Stand aside, *you*! Now, my dear fellow, what can I do for you? Demobbed? Certainly!”

My turn came at last, and my papers were savagely inspected. (No chair or smiles for the likes o’ me!)

"Go down the passage and you'll come to a partition. Go behind it and show them your papers. Then come back here."

I went meekly down the passage and found the partition. Behind it sat three small boys—aged respectively, I should say, fourteen, thirteen, and twelve. They were dressed in mufti.

The one aged fourteen indicated a chair in front of him and took up his pen.

"Demobbed?"

"Yes, please."

"Name?"

"Bell."

"Profession?"

"Author."

He sat back and gazed at me stedfastly. "Are you," he said at last, "the author of Bell's Latin Grammar?"

"I'm afraid not."

All personal interest vanished. "Claiming disabilities?" he shot out.

"I—er—I don't know. I might."

"If you do," he said impressively, "it will take you six weeks longer to get demobbed. Disabilities?"

"No disabilities."

He scribbled a few more lines and then handed me a form. "Take that back to the room you came from, and in two minutes you'll be out of the Army."

I thanked him warmly. "And," I added, "before long you'll be the boss of this place."

A look of withering scorn spread over his youthful face.

"Me? The boss? I'm nothing to do with this place!"

He may not have been, but the fact remained that after three strenuous days he had demobilised me in two minutes. This boy of fourteen had accomplished a task that had baffled the whole staff of the Air Force.

I went back to the Napoleonic telephonist and was careful to mind the wire. A few minutes later I descended the stairs a free man. Returning to Brighton by the next train, I stopped on the way from the station to buy a civilian tie and a civilian pair of socks. The moment I was in my flat, I tore off my suit of khaki and flung it to the four corners of the room. This was in no way disrespect for the King's uniform, which I still treasure. It was just an expression of infinite relief. It was my Armistice Day.

I have never to this day received my formal commission.

But I have, framed and hanging in the place of honour in my study, a letter from Buckingham Palace which conveys His Majesty's gracious acceptance of my War-book, "An Author in Wonderland."

Never did I hit on a more appropriate title.

CHAPTER XXIV

FILMS AND LECTURES

HERE are two sidelines in the life of an author which relieve the monotony of work at the writing-table.

I have not had very much experience of the films, although I have been to Los Angeles. Three of my books have so far been filmed, "The God in the Garden," "Miss Charity," and "King of the Castle."

"The God in the Garden" and "Miss Charity" were filmed by the Masters Film Company and exploited by Butchers Film Service, Limited.

The Masters people had acquired a fine old house with a very lovely garden at Teddington, close to the weir, and I obtained their permission to spend a day in watching the producer and the camera-artist at work.

It was a very hot day in summer when I went over to Teddington. I was directed to the house by the river, and turned in at the drive-gate. In a moment I experienced one of the most extraordinary sensations of my life. There, dotted about in that beautiful garden, were all the characters from "The God in the Garden," just as I had conceived them and put them on paper so long ago as 1904 ! Here was the Curate, and Miss Carroway, and Miss Snitterfield, and Stella, and Mrs. Box, and Shakespeare, and all the rest of them !

They could not know, of course, the impression

they made on me. They were simply awaiting their call to the studio. They shook hands in quite the ordinary way, probably saying to themselves, "Oh ! So that's you, is it ?"

But it was quite otherwise for me. I have often met my characters in the theatre, but then one has grown with them from the first rehearsal. And a theatre is a theatre. This was a garden ; the sun streamed down ; and there on a soft grassy bank, beneath a huge tree, the Curate lounged and talked to Stella just as they had done in the book so many years ago. Yes, and he was not at the moment play-acting, either.

I was taken into the studio, which was really, I think, the conservatory. The heat was tremendous. I remember that after each shot the Curate had to retire and replenish his make-up. But they were all very patient and wonderfully painstaking—now the tiny rehearsal, then the repetition, then the shot.

The managing director asked me if I would like to see so much of the film as they had completed. I said I certainly would, so we retired to an outbuilding that had probably been a stable. I was given a bench in front of the screen, and the managing director himself retired to the far end of the stable and worked the lantern.

Here was another thrill. With myself as sole spectator, the story was slowly unfolded. I know that I was delighted with the experience—delighted with the care that had been taken and with the excellent photography. All the exterior scenes were exquisite in their beauty. I felt that my little story was unworthy of so much loveliness.

One scene took place, as in the novel, in a village

church. How it had been worked I know not, but here was a real church, and all the humble villagers trooping in and taking their accustomed places.

The story turns on the sermon preached by the Curate, and the effect of this sermon on Stella, the heroine, and on Miss Carroway, her aunt who hated men and all talk of marriage. When the run-through was over, the managing director confessed that they were in a difficulty. In the book I had not given the actual words of the sermon, but merely indicated the line taken by the preacher. They thought the actual words, in a condensed form, should be thrown on the screen. Would I write the sermon for them?

Certainly I would. I loved to help. There and then, I sat down and wrote the sermon in brief, and this was afterwards used for the film.

The Trade Show was held at the New Gallery, Regent Street, and among the audience was Miss Ellen Terry, whose daughter, Miss Edith Craig, was the Miss Carroway of the picture, and gave a very fine performance. My father was also present, and I had the privilege of presenting the old gentleman to Miss Ellen Terry. It was rather a wonderful moment when the aged country Vicar and the great London actress shook hands and chatted together about the picture they had just witnessed. (The scene of the book, by the way, was laid in my father's parish.)

I asked Miss Terry how she liked the film.

"Very much indeed," she said, "but the next time my daughter acts for you, I hope you'll give her a *nicer* part to play."

"Miss Charity" was an equally good picture—better in the sense that it was more dramatic, and thus

gave the producer more scope. Both had open-air settings, and there is nothing I like better on the films than reproductions of the beautiful English countryside. Yet film people tell me that the general public will not look at them. I beg leave to doubt the accuracy of this statement. Of course, the story must be interesting and amusing. Scenery without human life would soon tire even the most enthusiastic of us.

“King of the Castle” was a different matter. Here the great firm of Stoll held sway, and I had little to do with it beyond passing the scenario and writing some of the titles. I am told that this is the most successful film ever turned out by the Stoll Studios, and if the number of bookings is any criterion, that is probably true. First released in the early part of March of last year, 1926, it was at once booked up for some eight hundred picture-houses, and the bookings go on right into 1927. I am rather fond of astonishing my friends with the type-written list of bookings.

Henry Edwards was the producer, and the stars Marjorie Hume and Brian Aherne. Dawson Milward and Prudence Vanbrugh were also in the cast.

It is very difficult for any author to have much say in the matter of a big film like this. His story is bought outright, thousands are spent in making a picture of it, and the producer is the boss of the show. For all that, an author, like a charwoman, has his feelings, and I am going to point out one or two ways in which, in my opinion, this film could have been improved.

First of all, take the setting. The scene is laid in Brighton, in London, in Stockholm, and in Northumberland. The main portion of the story takes place in Northumberland, at the castle belonging to the leading

female character. There is also a dramatic scene in the book laid on those sands between the mainland and Holy Island, rendered famous for all time by the heroism of Grace Darling.

Now, when the gentleman representing the Stoll Studios called on me at my club to negotiate for the film-rights of the book, he laid great stress on the Northumbrian coast scenes. He said :

“ What particularly took our fancy were those scenes on the coast of Northumberland. Those ought to come out splendidly in the film.”

I was delighted. I had visited the spot I had described in the book, and shuddered as I looked from the summit of the cliff sheer down to the rocks three hundred feet below. That was how I got the idea of the child falling over, and being caught by her clothing thirty feet from the summit, and wriggling to free herself because the clothes “ hurt so,” and the hero making her repeat the grace from Herrick while he waited for the rope, and then singing to the child his own musical setting of the grace, and finally going over the edge and swinging out into that awful space.

I knew it could be faked easily enough in the studio, but the actual cliff must be shown to give the audience the necessary thrill. I told my friend Bamborough Castle would make a gorgeous setting, and he agreed. In fact, we both got so excited that he stayed to lunch.

Very well, then. They took the pictures in Cornwall.

The coast they used was picturesque enough, but not terrifying. I could have walked from the summit to the shore with my hands in my pockets. The rescue scene when it came was a genuine thrill. I was thrilled

myself. But the mind had not been prepared for the inevitable deaths of the man and the child if the rope broke. You felt they would fall a little way and then stop. Whereas in Northumberland—!

I am sure no American producer would have been satisfied with the lesser thrill, and that is why they beat us at the game.

I am labouring these points a little because so many people wonder why the English film cannot compete with the American productions. I hold that we deliberately fritter away our chances.

Have you ever been to Holy Island? If you have, you know that you can walk to the island across the sands when the tide is low, but that the tide comes up with surprising swiftness, so that many have been caught. For this reason, a series of shelters have been built so many yards apart all the way across. They look like rough pulpits.

In my book, the heroine and her girl-cousin, both candidates for a huge fortune, are caught together by this tide. There is a big scene in one of these shelters, with the waters swirling about them and the night coming down. Eventually they are rescued by one of the carts with enormous wheels that are kept for the purpose of getting through those waters at high tide.

I dilated on this scene to my friend, and assured him that all the setting was to hand. Once the players were in the neighbourhood, that thrill would cost nothing but the hire of the cart and a shilling for the driver. And it was absolutely original.

They cut it out. The company were in Cornwall, not in Northumberland, so the scene had to go.

Another sin of omission, to my mind, was reducing

the part of Ezekiel Squance to a mere shadow. Squance was a faithful old clerk to a barrister ; I opened my book with him, and I kept him going throughout. He was just the character for a film or a play. Many well-known character-actors have said to me, " If you ever dramatise that book, the part I would love to play is the old clerk."

We didn't have two minutes of him ! I protested, as I had the right to protest, but I was over-ruled, as the author always is over-ruled. But I missed Squance dreadfully, and I am sure the balance of the story was upset by his comparative absence. You may say that film-audiences know nothing about " balance." They may not, in so many words, but they feel it.

For all that, as English films go, it was one of the best I have seen. The pictures in the Temple were very charming, but all too hurried. Mr. Henry Edwards, I feel sure, will not resent these criticisms. I only wish I had been given the chance of working with him throughout. But producers and theatrical managers always make the mistake of thinking that when an author has written his book or his play, that is all there is to be got out of him. What nonsense ! The author created the characters, and they will grow under his care far better than if put out to nurse.

Authors, nurse your characters : if you can't, leave it to a producer.

During a long winter at Hove, it occurred to me that tedium might be relieved by lecturing—if not the tedium of the public, at any rate that of the lecturer. So I collected about sixty to eighty of my favourite sketches—mainly given to me by the artists—and portraits of well-known people I had come across in

my quiet career. I had slides made of these, strung them together on the thread of my own life, and called the whole thing, "Personal Adventures with Celebrities."

I entrusted the business side of the matter to Mr. Gerald Christy, the famous lecture-agent who has handled all the big lectures, I suppose, in this country. Mine was not a big lecture, but he soon got me going, and the audience seemed to like the pictures and stories.

Lecturing is not difficult when you have good slides and plenty to talk about. I have done an hour and forty minutes without glancing at a note, and without, I hope, boring the audience. At any rate, they gave me a very fine "reception" at the conclusion. (An Irishism, but the jargon of the business.)

The real labour comes in getting to your hall and getting home again. This may be all very well for lecturers who live in London—though London by no means exhausts the field—but I do not, at the moment, and so I found myself with considerable journeys late at night.

This made the work too hard, and also ran away with the small profits. I had to decline a very tempting invitation to lecture at Edinburgh, and another to visit Jersey and Guernsey, whither I have never yet been in my life.

All audiences like an amusing story, and here are two which I used to tell when my final picture was on the screen. (This slide showed a corner of my house at Merstham. The house was named by me, "As You Like It," in memory of my boyhood's days in the Forest of Arden. The picture was painted for me by

my friend Phil Harker, the famous scenic artist. I had the slide done in colours, and very charmingly it comes out on the screen.)

During the early part of the war, I was motoring home after a performance of my play at the Criterion Theatre. On Streatham Common I was stopped by a policeman.

“There’s three summonses against you,” he said. This was alarming. “What for?” I asked.

“Well, in the first place, driving too fast. In the second place, showing too much light. In the third place, yer tail-lamp’s out.”

I descended quickly from the car. Sure enough, the tail-lamp was out.

“It’s only just gone out,” I explained. “Feel the lamp, constable! It’s a still hot!”

“Wot about the other two?”

“Well, I deny that I was driving fast. As for having too much light, those are only my side-lamps, and that’s how they came to me from the works. I’ll certainly deaden them down as much as possible.”

“Show me yer licence,” was the next order.

I handed it to him. There were no endorsements on it, but it bore of course, my name and full address. The constable read it all through gravely in the light of one of my offending lamps. Then he straightened himself and looked me hard in the face.

“Is that the name of yore ‘ouse?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“Oh, well,” he sighed, “drive on.”

I can only suppose the name was too much for him. What could you do with a man who lived in a house called, “As You Like It”?

The other adventure took place in Redhill, in the centre of the town, at the cross-roads.

One evening a policeman stopped me at this point and asked me for my name and address, all of which he wrote down very carefully in his little pocket-book. I was rather surprised, seeing that I was often in Redhill, and could not possibly be spying for the Germans. But he explained that his orders were to stop all cars, whether he knew them or not.

The very next evening I was again in Redhill, and again the same policeman stopped me.

“I want your name and address, please.”

“But,” I protested, “this is absurd ! You stopped me only last night and took my name and address ! Are you going to do that every time I come through ? I live at Merstham, man !”

He looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, and then his face brightened.

“Oh, yes !” cried he. “I remember yer now ! ‘Go As You Please’ !”

Which brought me to the end of my lecture, and almost to the conclusion of this lengthy volume.

CHAPTER XXV

WIRELESS FOR HOSPITALS

THEY used to tell us, when we were children, that the greatest pleasure in life came from giving happiness to others. We did not believe it, of course, and many people, I suppose, live and die without discovering the truth of that well-worn maxim. But I am sure that the greatest satisfaction in my life came to me from the part I was privileged to play in providing wireless for all hospitals throughout the country.

Like all big things—and I think I may fairly call this a big thing, for it has brought healing and pleasure to hundreds of thousands, and will continue to do so until the end of all things human—like all big things, it came to me quite simply. I have already told the story in the *Radio Times*, but I take leave to repeat it in this more permanent form. One day, perhaps, it will be of greater interest than it appears to some people now.

Let me say, first of all, that I do not claim, and never have claimed, to be the first person to equip a hospital with wireless. Certain hospitals had the wireless before I thought of my scheme, but they had not broadcast the news of their great blessing, and most of us—certainly myself—knew nothing of these isolated installations.

I did not become a convert to wireless until the

beginning of November, 1924. Then, when the long winter began to settle down on us, I thought it would be good to have something to relieve the tedium of the wet cold days and the long nights.

So I went into the matter with local experts, and eventually bought a very nice four-valve set. I was informed that the Prime Minister and Earl Beatty used similar sets, so I thought it ought to be good enough for me. And it nearly always has been good enough for me.

This set was installed in my home on November 6, 1924. That was a Thursday. On the Saturday following, about one o'clock, I hailed some friends who were passing and invited them to come in and listen to music from Paris. They came in, the sun was shining, and all the world was jolly.

They had not been gone ten minutes when I suddenly felt ill. I had no idea what was the matter with me. I simply subsided into a chair and refused all suggestions of lunch.

The doctor was sent for, and diagnosed an attack of influenza. That meant bed—and no wireless. This was all the more disappointing because the next afternoon there was to be a children's service relayed from Newcastle, and I had been looking forward to hearing it.

The next day I felt better, and so decided to risk it. I got out of bed, went downstairs, pulled a big chair close to the fire, and turned on the wireless. The service came through from Newcastle with the utmost clearness. I heard the choir, the organ, the address to the children, and, above all, the voices of the children singing one of their familiar, simple hymns.

As I listened my first thought was, "I wish my father could hear this." I have told you that he was a parson, and wholly devoted to his calling. Now he was a very old man, lying in his bed at Oxford, waiting for the end. And I wondered whether I could arrange for the wireless to be installed in his bedroom.

I turned to my wife and said, "What a marvellous thing this would be for people bedridden or for people in a hospital! Instead of lying all day looking at the depressing scenes around them, and letting their thoughts dwell on their own misfortunes, they could listen to the music and hear all the news of the outer world! If a loud-speaker proved too noisy for any particular case, all the patients could have head-phones hanging by their beds, and just put them on when they felt inclined!"

It was a great idea, though I say it, and I felt that I had hit on something worth doing. But it was too late for my father to enjoy these blessings. A fortnight later he breathed his last.

Naturally, my thoughts turned in the next place to our own local hospital—the Royal County Sussex. It was to this hospital that my eldest brother, the late R. S. Warren Bell, was conveyed at his own request when suffering from the complaint that caused his death, and it was in this hospital that he passed away.

He had asked me, when he knew there was no hope for him, to do what I could to repay the doctors and the nursing staff for all the care and attention he had received. The matter had been on my mind ever since his death. Contributions in money and kind were easy enough, but these did not seem sufficient.

Quite suddenly the idea flashed into my mind that I

would raise a fund to equip every ward in this hospital with wireless. I say with all reverence that the idea must have been inspired.

Having received it, I could not possibly rest until I had carried it out to the utmost of my ability. After securing the consent of the hospital authorities, I at once got into touch with the leading electrical firms in the town, and asked for tenders. I accepted the lowest, which, fortunately, came from the firm who were in the habit of doing electrical work at the hospital.

I set the sum wanted at £300. The main thing was to raise this money without incurring much cost. I could not afford to advertise in the usual ways, so I tried inexpensive ways.

Being a journalist, I naturally thought first of the Press. I went to the respective Editors of the *Sussex Daily News* and the *Brighton and Hove Herald*, and asked them to publish a letter announcing the scheme. They agreed. I then went further, and asked them to acknowledge in their columns, without charge, all sums subscribed, even the smallest. They agreed. That was a splendid start.

I next went to the manager of Tillings' 'buses, and asked him if he would display a double-sided bill in the windows of his 'buses. He agreed. I then called on the managers of the Theatre Royal, the Regent, the Academy, and other well-known places of entertainment. The manager of the Theatre Royal, Mr. Lawson Lambert, acted as my honorary treasurer, and inserted appeals, which I supplied, in all his programmes. The managers of the picture-houses displayed an appeal on the screen at each "session."

The next step was collecting-cards. I had a lot of

these cards printed setting forth the object at the top and leaving a space for names and amounts below. I called personally at every hotel on the front and persuaded them to display a card. I also called on the secretaries of all the six golf clubs with these cards. Some of them were very good about it and got quite a lot of money ; others refused point-blank to hang the card up at all. No matter. I forgive them. They knew not what they did.

My wife acted as my hon. sec., and she went right through the Court Directory for Brighton and Hove and the neighbourhood, and personally sent off five hundred circulars, fully stamped. (I don't believe in halfpenny stamps. I know how I treat such missives myself.)

I am still constantly receiving letters from all parts of the country asking for copies of my appeals. Alas, I have but one of each remaining, so I cannot comply. But I will venture, for the good of the cause, to insert them here. This is the general circular. It has some little historic interest :

THE ROYAL SUSSEX COUNTY HOSPITAL WIRELESS FUND

“ He gives twice who gives quickly.”

Christmas, 1924

DEAR SIR (OR MADAM),

A week or two ago, after listening to a delightful entertainment by wireless, I read an article by an expert, from which I learnt that one powerful set was sufficient to work a loud-speaker in every room in a house, or, of course, a number of head-phones.

It then occurred to me what a splendid Christmas present this would make for the Royal Sussex County Hospital—a loud-speaker in each Ward, or, when quiet was essential, head-phones for the patients who were well enough to listen. Also an extension line to the Nurses' Home.

I therefore wrote to the Secretary of the Hospital to ask if they would accept such a gift should I be fortunate enough to raise the money by private or public subscription. The matter came before the Committee, and also the Honorary Medical and Surgical Staff, and they replied that they accepted the offer with grateful thanks.

The loud-speaker, naturally, would be under the control of the Sister of each Ward.

My next step was to obtain estimates from three leading electrical firms in Brighton and Hove, who visited the Hospital and went into the matter very thoroughly. As a result, I find that a powerful set could be installed in the house of the Engineer attached to the Hospital (who already possesses an aerial and would re-charge the batteries as required), with sufficient first-class loud-speakers and head-phones to carry out the scheme, for the sum of about £300. If I obtain more than this amount, the money would be invested and the interest used to pay the very small annual upkeep—say £5 a year.

Will you help me to bring this great alleviation and pleasure at Christmastime, and for years to come, to sufferers lying in our County Hospital? If you will, please send your subscription, *as soon as possible*, to Mr. LAWSON LAMBERT, Theatre

Royal, Brighton, who has, with characteristic kindness, consented to act as Honorary Treasurer. All amounts subscribed will be acknowledged in the *Sussex Daily News* and the *Brighton and Hove Herald*.

Ten Guineas will buy *and endow* a first-class loud-speaker. One Guinea will buy *and endow* a head-phone.

I am, Yours obediently,

KEBLE HOWARD,
Hon. Organizer.

And here is the appeal we slipped into the programmes at the Theatre Royal :

THE ROYAL SUSSEX COUNTY HOSPITAL
WIRELESS FUND

The above title is almost self-explanatory.

As a Christmas Gift to the County Hospital, and with their grateful consent, and with the approval of the Honorary Medical and Surgical Staff, we propose to equip all the Wards of the Hospital, and the Nurses' Home, with a permanent first-class Wireless apparatus. There will be a loud-speaker for each Ward, and the walls will be plugged for head-phones for use when the loud-speakers would be too disturbing to a serious case.

Think of what this would mean to you if you were lying in a hospital ward, cut off from the outside world, with little to distract your thoughts from your own sufferings and the sufferings of those about

you. Suddenly, into this atmosphere of sadness and depression, come the strains of music, the chimes of London bells, and the sweet voices of choristers chanting the familiar and well-loved hymns and carols. And this will not be merely for the season of Christmas—it will be for **ALWAYS**!

We want £300. That is all. Will you help? If you will, the Honorary Treasurer of the Fund is Mr. Lawson Lambert, the Manager of the Theatre Royal, Brighton, to whom all donations should be sent as speedily as possible, since Christmas is so near.

Believe me, your Christmas will be none the less happy for thinking of the unbounded pleasure that you are helping to give to those unfortunate ones who will be sadly missed from the family circle.

(Signed) **KEBLE HOWARD,**
Hon. Organiser.

The money came in with astonishing rapidity. One amount was all in farthings, contributed by the “Wolf Cubs.” We soon had our £300, and could give the order to the electricians.

Whilst all this was going on, I was due, on November 27, to broadcast a selection from my books from the London Studio. This had nothing to do with the hospital scheme, but it gave me the idea I needed.

On November 30, having now faced the microphone with some success, I wrote to the B.B.C. and also to the *Radio Times*, asking if I might broadcast an appeal for wireless to be installed *in every hospital in the kingdom*. That was, admittedly, the first suggestion made by anybody for a national movement.

I received a reply from the B.B.C. on December 3 saying that I could broadcast my appeal to all stations at 9.40 on December 29th. This I did, taking great pains to explain the necessary steps that should be taken to raise the money ; the cost of equipment ; the best type of apparatus. I concluded with as eloquent an appeal as I could frame in words.

What happened next I ought to have expected, but I did not. From every part of the kingdom came letters asking me to repeat in writing all the steps I had explained over the microphone. It was not that they had not heard—people were good enough to say they heard me very well—but, of course, they had not had time to write it all down.

There was nothing for it but to answer all these letters individually. Having put my hand to the plough, I could not look back. I do not keep a secretary, but my wife helped me most willingly.

It took us five months to reply to all our correspondents.

My appeal over the microphone had been printed in the *Radio Times* under the heading—not my heading but the Editor's—of, “A Happy Idea.” I was also asked to write articles and leaders on the subject for some provincial journals, and with these requests I naturally complied.

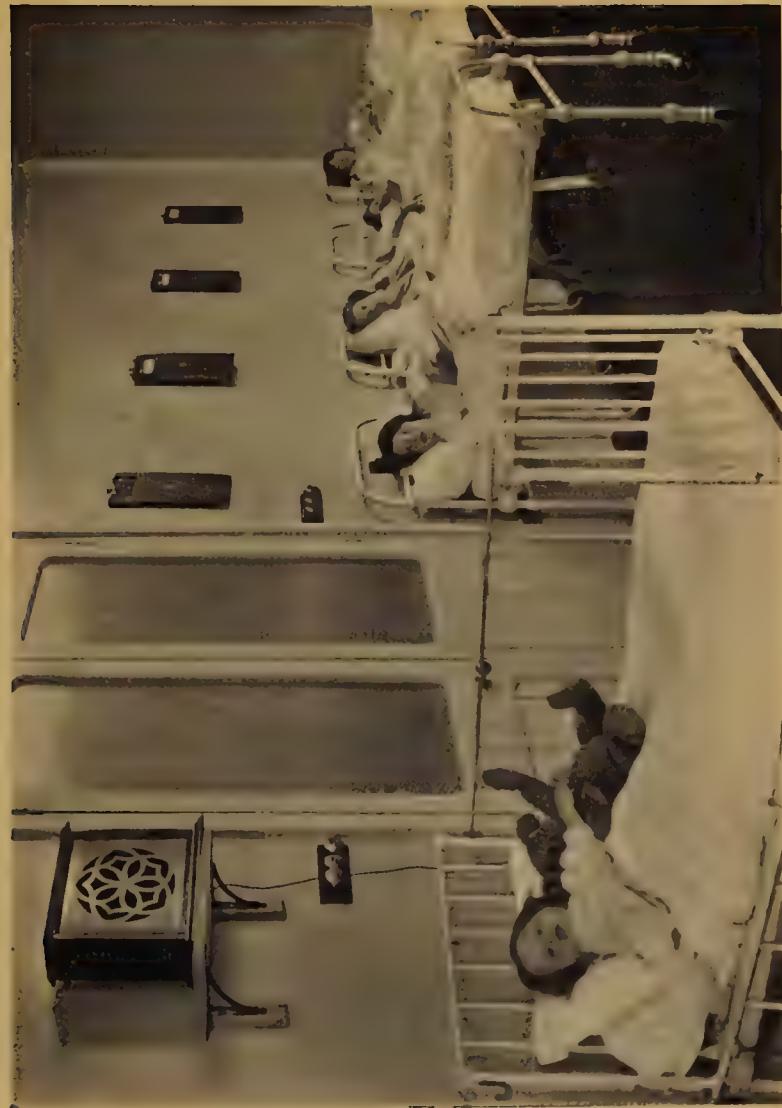
One aspect of the matter, however, still worried me. In a village, a town, or a city you can appeal to public spirit, but who can appeal to the public spirit of a vast world like London ? I did not see how I, a lone individual working from his study in the country, could get at London. Great, therefore, was my relief when on May 29, 1925, I heard it announced by

wireless that a London daily paper had decided to come to the rescue, and raise a fund to equip the hospitals of London.

My own national job was still far from being finished. I kept pegging away in the *Radio Times*, and through the post. On the last night of 1925 I was once again allowed to speak for the cause from London over the microphone, and as these pages go to press I am arranging with the B.B.C. to broadcast the total result of the whole effort throughout the kingdom.

That is the bare outline of the origin of the national movement for wireless in hospitals. I shall always feel humbly grateful that it was given to me to bring this great and blessed charity before the general public, and that the public, all over the land, responded so quickly and with such generosity.

And now, my friend, the time has come for me to rise up and continue my journey. The road still winds uphill, but I shall face it with a braver heart if I may have the pleasure and the consolation of your charming company.



A daily scene in hundreds of Hospitals all over the British Isles. Patients at the East Surrey Hospital listening to the wireless.
"It was your talk on a dreary Sunday evening that first gave us the idea."—*Extract from a letter to the Author.*

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